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PATRONAGE

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PATRONAGE

BY

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PATRONAGE.

Chapter xxiv.

NOTWITHSTANDING all the patronage of fashion, which the Miss Falconers had for some time enjoyed, notwithstanding all their own accomplishments, and their mother's address and knowledge of the world, the grand object had not been obtained—for they were not married. Though everywhere seen, and everywhere admired, no proposals had yet been made adequate to their expectations. In vain had one young nobleman after another, heir-apparent after heir-apparent, been invited, cherished, and flattered by Mrs Falconer, had been constantly at her balls and concerts, had stood beside the harp and the pianoforte, had danced or flirted with the Miss Falconers, had been hung out at all public places as a pendant to one or other of the sisters.

The mother, seeing project after project fail for the establishment of her daughters, forced to bear and to conceal these disappointments, still continued to form new schemes with indefatigable perseverance. Yet every season the difficulty increased; and Mrs Falconer, in the midst of the life of pleasure which she seemed to lead, was a prey to perpetual anxiety.

She knew that if anything should happen to the commissioner, whose health was declining; if he should lose Lord Oldborough's favour, which seemed not impossible; if Lord Oldborough should not be able to maintain himself in power, or if he should die; she and her daughters would lose everything. From a small estate, overwhelmed with debt, there would be no fortune for her daughters; they would be left utterly destitute, and absolutely unable to do anything for themselves—unlikely to suit plain country gentlemen, after the high style of company in which they had lived, and still more incapable than she would be of bearing a reverse of fortune. The young ladies, confident of their charms, unaccustomed to reflect, and full of the present, thought little of these probabilities of future evil, though they were quite as impatient to be married as their mother could wish. Indeed, this impatience becoming visible, she was rather anxious to suppress it, because it counteracted her views. Mrs Falconer had still two schemes for their establishment. Sir Robert Percy had luckily lost his wife within the last twelvemonth, had no children, and had been heard to declare that he would marry again as soon as he decently could, because, if he were to die without heirs, the Percy estate might revert to the relations, whom he detested. Mrs Falconer had persuaded the commissioner to cultivate Sir Robert Percy's acquaintance; had this winter watched for the time when law business called him to town; had prevailed upon him to go to her house, instead of staying, as he usually did, at an hotel, or spending his day at his solicitor's chambers. She had, in short, made things so agreeable to him, and he seemed so well pleased with her, she had hopes he would in time be brought to propose for her daughter Arabella. To conciliate Sir Robert Percy, it was

necessary to avoid all connexion with *the other Percys;* and it was for this reason that the commissioner had of late avoided Alfred and Erasmus. Mrs Falconer's schemes for Georgiana, her beautiful daughter, were far more brilliant. Several great establishments she had in view. The appearance of Count Altenberg put many old visions to flight—her whole fancy fixed upon him. If she could marry her Georgiana to Count Altenberg!—There would be a match high as her most exalted ambition could desire; and this project did not seem impossible. The count had been heard to say that he thought Miss Georgiana Falconer the handsomest woman he had seen since he had been in London. He had admired her dancing, and had listened with enthusiastic attention to her music, and to her charming voice; the young lady herself was confident that he was, would be, or ought to be, her slave. The count was going into the country for some weeks with Lord Oldborough. Mrs Falconer, though she had not seen Falconer Court for fifteen years, decided to go there immediately. Then she should have the count fairly away from all the designing mothers and rival daughters of her acquaintance, and besides—she might, by this seasonable visit to the country, secure Sir Robert Percy for her daughter Arabella. The commissioner rejoiced in his lady's determination, because he knew that it would afford him an opportunity of obliging Lord Oldborough. His lordship had always been averse to the trouble of entertaining company. He disliked it still more since the death of Lady Oldborough; but he knew that it was necessary to keep up his interest and his popularity in the country, and he would, therefore, be obliged by Mrs Falconer's giving dinners and entertainments for him. This game had succeeded, when it had been played—at the time of the Marchioness of Twicken-

ham's marriage. Mr Falconer was particularly anxious now to please Lord Oldborough, for he was fully aware that he had lost ground with his patron, and that his sons had all in different ways given his lordship cause of dissatisfaction. With Buckhurst Falconer Lord Oldborough was displeased for being the companion and encourager of his nephew, Colonel Hauton, in extravagance and gaming. In paying his court to the nephew, Buckhurst lost the uncle. Lord Oldborough had hoped that a man of literature and talents, as Buckhurst had been represented to him, would have drawn his nephew from the turf to the senate, and would have raised in Colonel Hauton's mind some noble ambition.

"A clergyman! sir," said Lord Oldborough to commissioner Falconer with a look of austere indignation—"What could induce such a man as Mr Buckhurst Falconer to become a clergyman?" The commissioner, affecting to sympathize in this indignation, declared that he was so angry with his son that he would not see him. All the time, however, he comforted himself with the hope that his son would, in a few months, be in possession of the long-expected living of Chipping Friars, as the old incumbent was now speechless. Lord Oldborough had never, after this disowning of Buckhurst, mentioned his name to the father, and the commissioner thought this management had succeeded.

Of John Falconer, too, there had been complaints. Officers returned from abroad had spoken of his stupidity, his neglect of duty, and, above all, of his boasting that, let him do what he pleased, he was sure of Lord Oldborough's favour—certain of being a major in one year, a lieutenant-colonel in two. At first his boasts had been laughed at by his brother officers, but when, at the year's end, he actually was made a major,

their surprise and discontent were great. Lord Oldborough was blamed for patronizing such a fellow. All this, in course of time, came to his lordship's knowledge. He heard these complaints in silence. It was not his habit suddenly to express his displeasure. He heard, and saw, without speaking or acting, till facts and proofs had accumulated in his mind. He seemed to pass over many things unobserved, but they were all registered in his memory, and he would judge and decide at last in an instant, and irrevocably. Of this commissioner Falconer, a cunning man, who watched parts of a character narrowly, but could not take in the whole, was not aware. He often blessed his good fortune for having escaped Lord Oldborough's displeasure or detection, upon occasions when his lordship had marked all that the commissioner imagined he had overlooked; his lordship was often most awake to what was passing, and most displeased, when he appeared most absent or unmoved.

For instance, many mistakes, and much ignorance, had frequently appeared in his envoy Cunningham Falconer's despatches: but except when, in the first moment of surprise at the difference between the ineptitude of the envoy, and the talents of the author of the pamphlet, his lordship had exclaimed, "*A slovenly despatch*," these mistakes, and this ignorance, had passed without animadversion. Some symptoms of duplicity, some evasion of the minister's questions, had likewise appeared, and the commissioner had trembled lest the suspicions of his patron should be awakened.

Count Altenberg, without design to injure Cunningham, had accidentally mentioned in the presence of the commissioner and of Lord Oldborough something of a transaction which was to be kept a profound secret from the minister, a private intrigue which Cunningham

had been carrying on to get himself appointed envoy to the court of Denmark, by the interest of the opposite party, in case of a change of ministry. At the moment when this was alluded to by Count Altenberg, the commissioner was so dreadfully alarmed that he perspired at every pore; but perceiving that Lord Oldborough expressed no surprise, asked no explanation, never looked towards him with suspicion, nor even raised his eyes, Mr Falconer flattered himself that his lordship was so completely engrossed in the operation of replacing a loose glass in his spectacles, that he had not heard or noticed one word the count had said. In this hope the commissioner was confirmed by Lord Oldborough's speaking an instant afterwards precisely in his usual tone, and pursuing his previous subject of conversation, without any apparent interruption in the train of his ideas. Yet, notwithstanding that the commissioner fancied that he and his son had escaped, and were secure in each particular instance, he had a general feeling that Lord Oldborough was more reserved towards him; and he was haunted by a constant fear of losing, not his patron's esteem or confidence, but his favour. Against this danger he constantly guarded. To flatter, to keep Lord Oldborough in good humour, to make himself agreeable and necessary by continual petty submissions and services, was the sum of his policy.

It was with this view that he determined to go to the country; and with this view he had consented to various expences, which were necessary, as Mrs Falconer declared, to make it practicable for her and her daughters to accompany him. Orders were sent to have a theatre at Falconer Court, which had been long disused, fitted up in the most elegant manner. The Miss Falconers had been in the habit of acting at Sir Thomas and Lady Flowerton's private theatre

at Richmond, and they were accomplished actresses. Count Altenberg had declared that he was particularly fond of theatrical amusements. That hint was sufficient. Besides, what a sensation the opening of a theatre at Falconer Court would creat in the country! Mrs Falconer observed, that the only possible way to make the country supportable was to have a large party of town friends in your house—and this was the more necessary for her, as she was almost a stranger in her own county.

Alfred kept his promise, and sent Rosamond a list of the persons of whom the party was to consist. Opposite to several names he wrote—commonplace young—or, commonplace old ladies:—of the latter number were Lady Trant and Lady Kew: of the former were the Miss G—s, and others not worth mentioning. Then came the two Lady Arlingtons, nieces of the Duke of Greenwich.

"The Lady Arlingtons," continued Alfred, "are glad to get to Mrs Falconer, and Mrs Falconer is glad to have them, because they are related to my lord duke. I have met them at Mrs Falconer's, at Lady Angelica Headingham's, and often at Lady Jane Granville's. The style and tone of the Lady Anne is languishing—of Lady Frances, lively; both seem mere spoilt selfish ladies of quality. Lady Anne's selfishness is of the cold, chronic, inveterate nature; Lady Frances's of the hot, acute and tormenting species. She 'loves everything by fits, and nothing long.' Everybody is *an angel*, and *a dear creature*, while they minister to her fancies—and no longer. About these fancies she is restless and impatient to a degree which makes her sister look sick and scornful beyond description. Lady Anne neither fancies nor loves anything or anybody. She seems to have no object upon earth but to drink barley-water, and save herself from all

manner of trouble or exertion, bodily or mental. So much for the Lady Arlingtons.

"Buckhurst Falconer cannot be of this party—Colonel Hauton has him at his regiment. But Buckhurst's two friends, the Clays, are earnestly pressed into the service. Notwithstanding the fine sanctified speech Mrs Falconer made me, about *that sad affair of Lewis Clay with Lady Harriot H——*, she invites him; and I have a notion, if Count Altenberg had not appeared, that she would like to have had him, *or* his brother, for her son-in-law. That you may judge how much my mother would like them for her sons-in-law, I will take the trouble to draw you portraits of both gentlemen.

"*French* Clay and *English* Clay, as they have been named, are brothers, both men of large fortune, which their father acquired respectably by commerce, and which they are spending in all kinds of extravagance and profligacy, not from inclination, but merely to purchase admission into fine company. French Clay is a travelled coxcomb, who, *à propos de bottes*, begins with, 'When I was abroad with the Princess Orbitella——' But I am afraid I cannot speak of this man with impartiality, for I cannot bear to see an Englishman apeing a Frenchman. The imitation is always so awkward, so ridiculous, so contemptible. French Clay talks of *tact*, but without possessing any; he delights in what he calls *persiflage*, but in his *persiflage*, instead of the wit and elegance of Parisian raillery, there appears only the vulgar love and habit of derision. He is continually railing at our English want of *savoir vivre*, yet is himself an example of the ill-breeding which he reprobates. His manners have neither the cordiality of an Englishman nor the polish of a foreigner. To improve us in *l'esprit de société*, he would introduce the whole system of French gallantry—the vice without the refinement.

I heard him acknowledge it to be 'his principle' to intrigue with every *married* woman who would listen to him, provided she has any one of his four requisites, wit, fashion, beauty, or a good table. He says his late suit in Doctors' Commons cost him nothing; for £10,000 are nothing to him.

"Public virtue, as well as private, he thinks it a fine air to disdain, and patriotism and love of our country he calls prejudices of which a philosopher ought to divest himself. Some charitable people say that he is not so unfeeling as he seems to be, and that above half his vices arise from affectation, and from a mistaken ambition to be what he thinks perfectly French.

"His brother, English Clay, is a cold, reserved, proud, dull-looking man, whom art, in despite of nature, strove, and strove in vain, to quicken into a 'gay deceiver.' He is a grave man of pleasure—his first care being to provide for his exclusively personal gratifications. His dinner is a serious, solemn business, whether it be at his own table or at a tavern, which last he prefers—he orders it so that his repast shall be the very best of its kind that money can procure. His next care is, that he be not cheated in what he is to pay. Not that he values money, but he cannot bear to be *taken in*. Then his dress, his horses, his whole appointment and establishment, are complete, and accurately in the fashion of the day—no expence spared. All that belongs to Mr Clay, of Clay Hall, is the best of its kind, or, at least, *had from the best hand* in England. Everything about him is English; but I don't know whether this arises from love of his country or contempt of his brother. English Clay is not ostentatious of that which is his own, but he is disdainful of all that belongs to another. The slightest deficiency in the *appointments* of his companions he sees, and marks by a wink to some bystander, or with a dry joke laughs the

wretch to scorn. In company he delights to sit by silent and snug, sneering inwardly at those who are entertaining the company, and *committing* themselves. He never entertains, and is seldom entertained. His joys are never convivial nor intellectual; he is gregarious, but not companionable; a hard drinker, but not social. Wine sometimes makes him noisy, but never makes him gay; and, whatever be his excesses, he commits them seemingly without temptation from taste or passion. He keeps a furiously expensive mistress, whom he curses, and who curses him, as Buckhurst informs me, ten times a day; yet he prides himself on being free and unmarried! Scorning and dreading women in general, he swears he would not marry Venus herself unless she had £100,000 in each pocket; and now that no mortal Venus wears pockets, he thanks Heaven he is safe. Buckhurst, I remember, assured me that beneath this crust of pride there is some good-nature. Deep hid under a large mass of selfishness, there may be some glimmerings of affection. He shows symptoms of feeling for his horses, and his mother, and his coachman, and his country. I do believe he would fight for old England, for it is his country, and he is English Clay. Affection for his coachman, did I say?—He shows admiration, if not affection, for every whip of note in town. He is their companion—no, their pupil, and, as Antoninus Pius gratefully prided himself in recording the names of those relations and friends from whom he learnt his several virtues, this man may boast to after-ages of having learnt from one coachman how to cut a fly off his near leader's ear, how to tuck up a duck from another, and the *true spit* from a third—by-the-bye, it is said, but I don't vouch for the truth of the story, that this last accomplishment cost him a tooth, which he had had drawn to attain it in perfection. Pure *slang* he could not learn from any one

coachman, but from constantly frequenting the society of all. I recollect Buckhurst Falconer telling me that he dined once with English Clay, in company with a baronet, a viscount, an earl, a duke, and the driver of a mail-coach, to whom was given, by acclamation, the seat of honour. I am told there is a house, at which these gentlemen and noblemen meet regularly every week, where there are two dining-rooms divided by glass doors. In one room the real coachmen dine, in the other the amateur gentlemen, who, when they are tired of their own conversation, throw open the glass doors, that they may be entertained and edified by the coachmen's wit and *slang ;* in which dialect English Clay's rapid proficiency has, it is said, recommended him to the *best* society, even more than his being the master of the best of cooks, and of Clay Hall.

"I have said so much more than I intended of both these brothers, that I have no room for more portraits ; indeed, the other gentlemen are zeroes.

* * * * * *

"Yours affectionately,
"Alfred Percy."

Notwithstanding the pains which Mrs Falconer took to engage these Mr Clays to accompany her, she could obtain only a promise that they would wait upon her, if possible, some time during the recess.

Count Altenberg also, much to Mrs Falconer's disappointment, was detained in town a few days longer than he had foreseen, but he promised to follow Lord Oldborough early in the ensuing week. All the rest of the *prodigious* party arrived at Falconer Court, which was within a few miles of Lord Oldborough's seat at Clermont Park.

The day after Lord Oldborough's arrival in the country, his lordship was seized with a fit of the gout,

which fixed in his right hand. Commissioner Falconer, when he came in the morning to pay his respects, and to inquire after his patron's health, found him in his study, writing a letter with his left hand. "My lord, shall not I call Mr Temple—or—could I offer my services as secretary?"

"I thank you, sir—no. This letter must be written with my own hand."

Who can this letter be to, that is of so much consequence? thought the commissioner; and glancing his eye at the direction, he saw, as the letter was given to a servant, "*To L. Percy, Esq.*"—His surprise arrested the pinch of snuff which he was just going to take. "What could be the business—the secret—only a few lines, what could they contain?"

Simply these words:

"My dear Sir,

"I write to you with my left hand, the gout having, within these few hours, incapacitated my right. Since this gout keeps me a prisoner, and I cannot, as I had intended, go to you, may I beg that you will do me the favour to come to me, if it could suit your convenience, to-morrow morning, when I shall be alone from twelve till four.

"With true esteem,
"Yours,
"Oldborough."

In the course of the day the commissioner found out, by something Lord Oldborough *let fall*, what his lordship had no intention to conceal, that he had requested Mr Percy to come to Clermont Park the next morning; and the commissioner promised himself that he would be in the way to see his good cousin Percy, and to satisfy his curiosity. But his manœuvres and windings were, whenever it was neces-

sary, counteracted and cut short by the unexpected directness and peremptory plain dealing of his patron. In the morning, towards the hour of twelve, the commissioner thought he had well begun a conversation that would draw out into length upon a topic which he knew must be interesting to his lordship, and he held in his hand private letters of great consequence from his son Cunningham; but Lord Oldborough, taking the letters, locked them up in his desk, saying, "To-night I will read them—this morning I have set apart for a conversation with Mr Percy, whom I wish to see alone. In the meantime, my interest in the borough has been left too much to the care of that attorney Sharpe, of whom I have no great opinion. Will you be so good to ride over, as you promised me that you would, to the borough, and see what is doing there?"

The commissioner endeavoured not to look disconcerted or discomfited, rang the bell for his horses, and took his leave, as Lord Oldborough had determined that he should, before the arrival of Mr Percy, who came exactly at twelve.

"I thank you for this punctuality, Mr Percy," said Lord Oldborough, advancing in his most gracious manner; and no two things could be more strikingly different than his gracious and ungracious manner. "I thank you for this kind punctuality. No one knows better than I do the difference between the visit of a friend and all other visits."

Without preface, Lord Oldborough always went directly to the point. "I have requested you to come to me, Mr Percy, because I want from you two things, which I cannot have so much to my satisfaction from any other person as from you—assistance and sympathy. But, before I go to my own affairs, let me—and not by way of compliment, but plainly and truly—let me

congratulate you, my dear sir, on the success of your sons, on the distinction and independence they have already acquired in their professions. I know the value of independence—of that which I shall never have," added his lordship, with a forced smile and a deep sigh. "But let that be. It was not of that I meant to speak. You pursue your course, I mine. Firmness of purpose I take to be the great difference between man and man. I am not one of those who habitually covet sympathy. It is a sign of a mind insufficient to its own support, to look for sympathy on every trivial occurrence; and on great occasions it has not been my good fortune to meet many persons who could sympathize with me."

"True," said Mr Percy, "people must think with you, before they can feel with you."

"It is extraordinary, Mr Percy," continued Lord Oldborough, "that, knowing how widely you differ from me in political principles, I should choose, of all men living, to open my mind to you. But the fact is, that I am convinced, however we may differ about the means, the end we both have in view is one and the same—the good and glory of the British Empire."

"My lord, I believe it," cried Mr Percy—with energy and warmth he repeated, "My lord, I believe it."

"I thank you, sir," said Lord Oldborough; "you do me justice. I have reason to be satisfied when such men as you do me justice; I have reason also to be satisfied that I have not to make the common complaint of those who serve princes. From him whom I have served I have not met with any ingratitude, with any neglect: on the contrary, I am well assured, that so firm is his conviction of my intending the good of his throne and of his people, that to preserve me his minister is the first wish of his heart. I am confident

that without hesitation he would dismiss from his councils any who should obstruct my views, or be inimical to my interests."

"Then, my lord, you are happy; if man can be happy at the summit of ambition."

"Pardon me. It is a dizzy height at best; but, were it attained, I trust my head would be strong enough to bear it."

"Lord Verulam, you know, my lord," said Mr Percy, smiling, "tells us, that people, by looking down precipices, do put their spirits in the act of falling."

"True, true," said Lord Oldborough, rather impatient at Mr Percy's going to Lord Verulam and philosophy. "But you have not yet heard the facts. I am encompassed with enemies, open and secret. Open enemies I meet and defy—their strength I can calculate and oppose; but the strength of my secret enemies I cannot calculate, for that strength depends on their combination, and that combination I cannot break till I know of what it consists. I have the power and the will to strike, but know not where to aim. In the dark I will not strike, lest I injure the innocent or destroy a friend. Light I cannot obtain, though I have been in search of it for a considerable time. Perhaps, by your assistance, it may be obtained."

"By my assistance!" exclaimed Mr Percy: "ignorant, as I am, of all parties, and of all their secret transactions, how, my dear lord, can I possibly afford you any assistance?"

"Precisely by your being unconnected with all parties—a cool stander-by, you can judge of the play—you can assist me with your general knowledge of human nature, and with a particular species of knowledge, of which I should never have guessed that you were possessed, but for an accidental discovery of it

made to me the other day by your son Alfred—your knowledge of the art of deciphering."

Lord Oldborough then produced the Tourville papers, related how they had been put into his hands by commissioner Falconer, showed him what the commissioner and his son had deciphered, pointed out where the remaining difficulty occurred, and explained how they were completely at a stand from their inability to decipher the word Gassoc, or to decide who or what it could mean. All the conjectures of the commissioner, the cassock, and the bishop, and the *gosshawk*, and the heraldic researches, and the French misnomers, and the puns upon the coats of arms, and the notes from Wilkins on universal language, and an old book on deciphering, which had been lent to the commissioner, and the private and public letters which Cunningham had written since he went abroad, were all laid before Mr Percy.

"As to my envoy, Mr Cunningham Falconer," said Lord Oldborough, as he took up the bundle of Cunningham's letters, "I do not choose to interrupt the main business before us, by adverting to him or to his character, farther than to point out to you this mark," showing a peculiar pencil mark, made on certain papers. "This is my note of distrust, observe, and this my note for mere circumlocution, or nonsense. And here," continued his lordship, "is a list of all those in, or connected with the ministry, whom it is possible may be my enemies." The list was the same as that on which the commissioner formerly went to work, except that the name of the Duke of Greenwich had been struck out, and two others added in his place, so that it stood thus: "Dukes of Doncaster and Stratford; Lords Coleman, Naresby, Skreene, Twisselton, Waltham, Wrexfield, Chelsea, and Lancaster; Sir Thomas Cope, Sir James Skipworth; secretaries

Arnold and Oldfield." This list was marked with figures, in different coloured inks, prefixed to each name, denoting the degrees of their supposed enmity to Lord Oldborough, and these had been calculated from a paper, containing notes of the probable causes and motives of their disaffection, drawn up by commissioner Falconer, but corrected, and in many places contradicted, by notes in Lord Oldborough's handwriting. His lordship marked which was *his* calculation of probabilities, and made some observations on the character of each, as he read over the list of names rapidly.

Doncaster, a dunce—Stratford, a miser—Coleman, a knave—Naresby, non compos—Skreene, the most corrupt of the corrupt—Twisselton, puzzle-headed—Waltham, a mere theorist—Wrexfield, a speechifier—Chelsea, a trimmer—Lancaster, deep and dark—Sir Thomas Cope, a wit, a poet, and a fool—Sir James Skipworth, finance and finesse—Arnold, able and active—and Oldfield, a diplomatist in grain.

"And is this the summary of the history of the men with whom your lordship is obliged to act and live?" said Mr. Percy.

"It is—I am: but, my dear sir, do not let us fly off at a tangent to morality or philosophy; these have nothing to do with the present purpose. You have before you all the papers relative to this transaction. Now will you do me the favour, the service, to look them over, and try whether you can make out *le mot d'énigme*. I shall not disturb you."

Lord Oldborough sat down at a small table by the fire, with a packet of letters and memorials beside him, and in a few minutes was completely absorbed in these, for he had acquired the power of turning his attention suddenly and entirely from one subject to another.

Without reading the mass of commissioner Fal-

coner's explanations and conjectures, or encumbering his understanding with all that Cunningham had collected, as if purposely to puzzle the cause, Mr Percy examined first very carefully the original documents—then Lord Oldborough's notes on the views and characters of the suspected persons, and the reasons of their several enmities or dissatisfaction. From the scale of probabilities, which he found had been with great skill calculated on these notes, he selected the principal names, and then tried with these, whether he could make out an idea that had struck him the moment he had heard of the Gassoc. He recollected the famous word Cabal, in the reign of Charles the Second, and he thought it possible that the cabalistical word Gassoc might be formed by a similar combination. But *Gassoc* was no English word, was no word of any language. Upon close examination of the Tourville papers, he perceived that the commissioner had been right in one of his suggestions, that the *G* had been written instead of a *C:* in some places it had been a *c* turned into a *g*, and the writer seemed to be in doubt whether the word should be Gassoc or Cassoc. Assuming, therefore, that it was *Cassock*, Mr Percy found the initials of six persons, who stood high in Lord Oldborough's scale of probabilities: Chelsea—Arnold—Skreene—Skipworth—Oldfield—Coleman; and the last k, for which he hunted in vain a considerable time, was supplied by Kensington (one of the Duke of Greenwich's titles), whose name had been scratched out of the list, since his reconciliation and connexion by marriage with Lord Oldborough, but who had certainly at one time been of the league of his lordship's enemies. Every circumstance and date in the Tourville papers exactly agreed with this explanation: the Cassock thus composed cleared up all difficulties; and passages, that were before dark and mysterious, were rendered by this

reading perfectly intelligible. The interpretation, when once given, appeared so simple, that Lord Oldborough wondered how it was possible that it had not before occurred to his mind. His satisfaction was great—he was at this moment relieved from all danger of mistaking friend for foe; he felt that his enemies were in his power, and his triumph secure.

"My dear sir," cried he, "you do not know, you cannot estimate, the extent of the service you have done me: far from wishing to lessen it in your eyes, I wish you to know at this moment its full importance. By Lady Oldborough's death, and by circumstances with which I need not trouble you, I lost the support of her connexions. The Duke of Greenwich, though my relation, is a weak man, and a weak man can never be a good friend. I was encompassed, undermined, the ground hollow under me—I knew it, but I could not put my finger upon one of the traitors. Now I have them all at one blow, and I thank you for it. I have the character, I believe, of being what is called proud, but you see that I am not too proud to be assisted and obliged by one who will never allow me to oblige or assist him or any of his family But why should this be? Look over the list of these men. In some one of these places of trust, give me a person in whom I can confide, a friend to me, and to your country. Look over that list, now in your hand, and put your finger upon anything that will suit you."

"I thank you, my lord," said Mr Percy; "I feel the full value of your good opinion, and true gratitude for the warmth of your friendship, but I cannot accept of any office under your administration. Our political principles differ as much as our private sentiments of honour agree; and these sentiments will, I trust, make you approve of what I now say—and do."

"But there are places, there are situations which you might accept, where your political opinions and mine could never clash. It is an extraordinary thing for a minister to press a gentleman to accept of a place, unless he expects more in return than what he gives. But come—I must have Mr Percy one of us. You have never tried ambition yet," added Lord Oldborough, with a smile: "trust me, you will find ambition has its pleasures, its proud moments, when a man feels that he has his foot on the neck of his enemies."

Lord Oldborough stood, as if he felt this pride at the instant. "You do not know the charms of ambition, Mr Percy."

"It may be delightful to feel one's foot on the neck of one's enemies, but, for my part, I rather prefer having no enemies."

"No enemies!" said Lord Oldborough: "every man that has character enough to make friends has character enough to make enemies—and must have enemies, if not of his power or place, of his talents and property—the sphere lower, the passion's the same. No enemies!—What is he, who has been at law with you, and has robbed you of your estate?"

"I forgot him—upon my word, I forgot him," said Mr Percy. "You see, my lord, if he robbed me of my estate, he did not rob me of my peace of mind. Does your lordship think," said Mr Percy, smiling, "that any ambitious man, deprived of his place, could say as much?"

"When I can tell you that from my own experience, you shall know," said Lord Oldborough, replying in the same tone; "but, thanks to your discovery, there seems to be little chance, at present, of my being competent to answer that question. But to business—we are wasting life."

Every word or action that did not tend to a political purpose appeared to Lord Oldborough to be a waste of life.

"Your ultimatum? Can you be one of us?"

"Impossible, my lord. Pardon me if I say, that the nearer the view your confidence permits me to take of the workings of your powerful mind, and of the pains and penalties of your exalted situation, the more clearly I feel that ambition is not for me, that my happiness lies in another line."

"Enough—I have done—the subject is at rest between us for ever." A cloud, followed instantaneously by a strong radiance of pleasure, passed across Lord Oldborough's countenance, while he pronounced, as if speaking to himself, the words, "Singular obstinacy! Admirable consistency! And I too am consistent, my dear sir," said he, sitting down at the table. "Now for business; but I am deprived of my right hand." He rang, and desired his secretary, Mr Temple, to be sent to him. Mr Percy rose to take leave, but Lord Oldborough would not permit him to go. "I can have no secrets from you, Mr Percy—stay and see the end of the Cassock."

Mr Temple came in; and Lord Oldborough, with that promptitude and decision by which he was characterised, dictated a letter to the king, laying before his Majesty the whole intrigue, as discovered by the Tourville papers, adding a list of the members of the *Cassock*—concluding by begging his Majesty's permission to resign, unless the cabal, which had rendered his efforts for the good of the country and for his Majesty's service in some points abortive, should be dismissed from his Majesty's councils. In another letter to a private friend, who had access to the royal ear, Lord Oldborough named the persons, whom, if his Majesty should do him the favour of consulting him, he should

wish to recommend in the places of those who might be dismissed. His lordship farther remarked, that the marriage which had taken place between his niece and the eldest son of the Duke of Greenwich, and the late proofs of his grace's friendship, dissipated all fears and resentment arising from his former connexion with the Cassock. Lord Oldborough therefore entreated his Majesty to continue his grace in his ministry. All this was stated in the shortest and plainest terms.

"No rounded periods, *no phrases*, no fine writing, Mr Temple, upon this occasion, if you please; it must be felt that these letters are straight from my mind, and that if they are not written by my own hand, it is because that hand is disabled. As soon as the gout will let me stir, I shall pay my duty to my sovereign in person. These arrangements will be completed, I trust, by the meeting of Parliament. In the meantime I am better here than in London; the blow will be struck, and none will know by whom—not but what I am ready to avow it, if called upon. But—let the coffee-house politicians decide, and the country gentlemen prose upon it," said Lord Oldborough, smiling—"some will say the ministry split on Indian affairs, some on Spanish, some on French affairs. How little they, any of them, know what passes or what governs behind the curtain! Let them talk—whilst I act."

The joy of this discovery so raised Lord Oldborough's spirits, and dilated his heart, that he threw himself open with a freedom and hilarity, and with a degree of humour unusual to him, and unknown except to the few in his most intimate confidence. The letters finished, Mr Temple was immediately despatched with them to town.

"There," said Lord Oldborough, as soon as Mr Temple had left him, "there's a secretary I can depend

upon; and there is another obligation I owe to your family—to your son Alfred."

Now this business of the Tourville papers was off his mind, Lord Oldborough, though not much accustomed to turn his attention to the lesser details of domestic life, spoke of every individual of the Percy family with whom he was acquainted; and, in particular, of Godfrey, to whom he was conscious that he had been unjust. Mr Percy, to relieve him from this regret, talked of the pleasure his son had had in his friend Gascoigne's late promotion to the lieutenant-colonelcy. Whilst Mr Percy spoke, Lord Oldborough searched among a packet of letters for one which made honourable mention of Captain Percy, and put it into the hands of the happy father.

"Ah! these are pleasurable feelings denied to me," said Lord Oldborough.

After a pause he added, "That nephew of mine, Colonel Hauton, is irretrievably profligate, selfish, insignificant. I look to my niece, the Marchioness of Twickenham's child, that is to say, if the mother——"

Another long pause, during which his lordship rubbed the glasses of his spectacles, and looked through them, as if intent that no speck should remain; while he did this very slowly, his mind ran rapidly from the idea of the Marchioness of Twickenham to John Falconer, and thence to all the causes of distrust and discontent which he felt towards all the different individuals of the Falconer family. He considered, that now the Tourville papers had been completely deciphered, the necessity for engaging the secrecy of the commissioner, and of his son Cunningham, would soon cease.

Lord Oldborough's reverie was interrupted by seeing, at this instant, the commissioner returning from his ride.

"Not a word, Mr Percy, of what has passed between us, to commissoner Falconer—not a word of

the *Gassoc.* I put you on your guard, because you live with those in whom you have entire confidence," said Lord Oldborough; "but that is what a public man, a minister, cannot do."

Another reason why I should not like to be a minister, thought Mr Percy. "I took it for granted that the commissioner was entirely in your lordship's confidence."

"I thought you were too good a philosopher to take anything for granted, Mr Percy. Consider, if you please, that I am in a situation where I must have tools, and use them, as long as I can make them serviceable to my purposes. Sir, I am not a missionary, but a minister. I must work with men, and upon men, such as I find them. I am not a chemist, to analyse and purify the gold. I make no objection to that alloy, which I am told is necessary, and fits it for being moulded to my purposes. But here comes the ductile commissioner."

Lord Oldborough began to talk to him of the borough, without any mercy for his curiosity, and without any attempt to evade the various dexterous pushes he made to discover the business which had this morning occupied his lordship. Mr Percy was surprised, in the course of this day, to see the manner in which the commissioner, a gentleman well-born, of originally independent fortune and station, humbled and abased himself to a patron. Mr Falconer had contracted a certain cringing servility of manner, which completely altered his whole appearance, and which quite prevented him even from looking like a gentleman. It was his principle never to contradict a great man, never to give him any sort of pain; and his idea of the deference due to rank, and of the danger of losing favour by giving offence, was carried so far, that not only his attitude and language, but his whole mind,

seemed to be new modified. He had not the free use of his faculties. He seemed really so to subdue and submit his powers, that his understanding was annihilated. Mr Percy was astonished at the change in his cousin; the commissioner was equally surprised, nay, actually terrified, by Mr Percy's freedom and boldness. "Good heavens! how can you speak in this manner?" said Mr Falconer, as they were going downstairs together, after parting with Lord Oldborough.

"And why not?—I have nothing to fear or to hope, nothing to gain or to lose. Lord Oldborough can give me nothing that I would accept, but his esteem, and that I am sure of never losing."

Heigho!—If I had your favour with my lord, what I would make of it! thought the commissioner, as he stepped into his chariot. Mr Percy mounted his horse, and rode back to his humble home, glad to have done his friend Lord Oldborough a service, still more glad that he was not bound to the minister by any of the chains of political dependence. Rejoiced to quit Tourville papers—state intrigues—lists of enemies—and all the necessity for reserve and *management*, and all the turmoil of ambition.

Chapter xxv.

COUNT Altenberg arrived at Clermont Park, and as Lord Oldborough was still confined by the gout, commissioner Falconer, to his lady's infinite satisfaction, was deputed to show him everything that was worth seeing in this part of the country. Every morning some party was formed by Mrs Fal-

coner, and so happily arranged, that her Georgiana and the count were necessarily thrown together. The count rode extremely well; Miss Falconers had been taught to ride in a celebrated riding-house, and were delighted to display their equestrian graces. When they were not disposed to ride, the count had a phaeton, and Mrs Falconer a barouche; and either in the phaeton, or the barouche seat, Miss Georgiana Falconer was seated with the count, who, as she discovered, drove uncommonly well.

The count had expressed a desire to see the place where M. de Tourville had been shipwrecked, and he really wished to be introduced to the Percy family, of whom, from the specimen he had seen in Alfred, and from all the hospitality they had shown the distressed mariners (some of whom were his countrymen), he had formed a favourable opinion. Half his wish was granted, the rest dispersed in empty air. Mrs Falconer with alacrity arranged a party for Percy Hall, to show the count the scene of the shipwreck. She should be so glad to see it herself, for she was absent from the country at the time of the sad disaster; but the commissioner, who knew the spot, and all the circumstances, better than any other person, would show them everything—and Sir Robert Percy, she was sure, would think himself much honoured by Count Altenberg's visiting his place.

Count Altenberg had some confused recollection of Mr Alfred Percy's having told him that his father no longer lived at Percy Hall; but this speech of Mrs Falconer's led the count to believe that he had misunderstood what Alfred had said.

The party arranged for Percy Hall consisted of the Miss Falconers, the two Lady Arlingtons, and some other young people, who were at Falconer Court. It was a fine morning, Mrs Falconer was all suavity and

smiles, both the Miss Falconers in charming hopes, and consequently in charming spirits.

Percy Hall was really a beautiful place, and Miss Arabella Falconer now looked at it with the pleasure of anticipated possession. Sir Robert Percy was not at home, he had been obliged that morning to be absent on some special business; but he had left orders with his steward and housekeeper to show the party of visitors the house and grounds. In going through the apartments, they came to the gallery leading to the library, where they were stopped by some workmen's trestles, on which were lying two painted glass windows, one that had been taken down, and another which was to be put in its stead. Whilst the workmen were moving the obstacles out of the way, the company had leisure to admire the painted windows. One of them was covered with coats of arms: the other represented the fire at Percy Hall, and the portrait of Caroline, assisting the old nurse down the staircase. This painting immediately fixed Count Altenberg's eye, and Miss Georgiana Falconer, not knowing whose portrait it was, exclaimed, as she looked at the figure of Caroline, "Beautiful! Exquisite! What a lovely creature that is assisting the old woman!"

"Yes," said Count Altenberg, "it is one of the finest countenances I ever beheld."

All the ladies eagerly pressed forward to look at it.

"Beautiful! Don't you think it is something like Lady Anne Cope?" said Miss Falconer.

"Oh! dear, no!" cried Miss Georgiana Falconer: "it is a great deal handsomer than any of the Copes ever were, or ever will be!"

"It has a look of Lady Mary Nesbitt," said one of the Lady Arlingtons.

"The eyes are so like Lady Coningsby, who is my delight," said Georgiana.

"And it has quite the Arlington nose," said Mrs Falconer, glancing her eye upon the Lady Arlingtons. Count Altenberg, without moving his eye, repeated, "It is the most beautiful face I ever beheld."

"Not nearly so beautiful as the original, sir," said the painter.

"The original?—Is it a copy?"

"A portrait, sir."

"Oh! a family portrait of one of our great, great grandmother Percys, I suppose," said Miss Georgiana, "done in her youth—in a fancy piece, you know, according to the taste of those times—she must have been superlatively lovely."

"Ma'am," said the painter, "the young lady, of whom this is a portrait, is, I hope and believe, now living."

"Where?—and who can she be?—for I am sure I don't recollect ever having seen her in all my life—never met her in town anywhere——Pray, sir, who may it be?" added she, turning to the artist, with a mixture of affected negligence and real pride.

"Miss Caroline Percy, ma'am."

"A daughter of Sir Robert Percy—of the gentleman of this house?" said Count Altenberg eagerly.

Mrs Falconer, and her daughter Georgiana, answered rapidly, with looks of alarm, as they stood a little behind the count.

"Oh! no, no, Count Altenberg," cried Mrs Falconer, advancing, "not a daughter of the gentleman of this house—another family, relations, but distant relations of the commissioner's: *he* formerly knew something of them, but *we* know nothing of them."

The painter, however, knew a great deal, and seemed anxious to tell all he knew: but Mrs Falconer walked on immediately, saying, "This is our way, is not it? This leads to the library, where, I dare say, we shall

find the book which the count wanted." The count heard her not, for with his eyes fixed on the picture he was listening to the account which the painter was giving of the circumstances it recorded of the fire at Percy Hall—of the presence of mind and humanity of Miss Caroline Percy, who had saved the life of the poor decrepit woman, who, in the picture, was represented as leaning upon her arm. The painter paused when he came to this part of his story—— "That woman was my mother, sir"——He went on, and with all the eloquence of filial affection and of gratitude, pronounced in a few words a panegyric on the family who had been his first and his best benefactors: all who heard him were touched with his honest warmth, except the Miss Falconers.

"I dare say *those* Percys were very good people in their day," said Miss Falconer; "but their day is over, and no doubt you'll find, in the present possessor of the estate, sir, as good a patron at least."

The artist took up his pencil without making any reply, and went on with some heraldic devices he was painting.

"I am amazed how you could see any likeness in that face or figure to Lady Anne Cope, or Lady Mary Nesbitt, or any of the Arlingtons," said Miss Georgiana Falconer, looking through her hand at the portrait of Caroline: "it's the most beautiful thing I ever saw, certainly; but there's nothing of an air of fashion, and without that——"

"Count Altenberg, I have found for you the very book I heard you tell the commissioner last night you wished so much to see," said Mrs Falconer. The count went forward to receive the book, and to thank the lady for her polite attention; she turned over the leaves, and showed him some uncommonly fine prints, which he was bound to admire—and whilst he was

admiring, Mrs Falconer found a moment to whisper to her daughter Georgiana, "Not a word more about the picture: let it alone, and it is only a picture—dwell upon it, and you make it a reality."

Miss Georgiana had quickness and ability sufficient to feel the value of her mother's knowledge of the world and of human nature, but she had seldom sufficient command of temper to imitate or to profit by Mrs Falconer's address. On this occasion she contented herself with venting her spleen on the poor painter, whose colouring and drapery she began to criticise unmercifully. Mrs Falconer, however, carried off the count with her into the library, and kept him there, till the commissioner, who had been detained in the neighbouring village by some electioneering business, arrived; and then they pursued their walk together through the park. Miss Falconer was particularly delighted with the beauties of the grounds. Miss Georgiana, recovering her good-humour, was again charming—and all went on well; till they came near the seashore, and the count asked commissioner Falconer to show him the place where the shipwreck had happened. She was provoked that his attention should be withdrawn from her, and again by these Percys. The commissioner called to one of the boatmen who had been ordered to be in readiness, and asked him to point out the place where the Dutch vessel had been wrecked. The man, who seemed rather surly, replied that they could not see the right place where they stood, and if they had a mind to see it, they must come into the boat, and row *a piece* up farther.

Now some of these town-bred ladies were alarmed at the idea of going to sea, and though Miss Georgiana was very unwilling to be separated from the count, and though her mother encouraged the young lady to

vanquish her fears as much by precept and as little by example as possible, yet when she was to be handed into the boat, she drew back in pretty terror, put her hands before her face, and protested she could not venture even with Count Altenberg. After as much waste of words as the discussion of such arrangements on a party of pleasure usually involves, it was at length settled that only the commissioner should accompany the count, that the rest of the gentlemen and ladies should pursue their walk, and that they should all meet again at the park-gate. The surly boatman rowed off, but he soon ceased to be surly when the count spoke of the humanity and hospitality which had been shown to some of his countrymen by Mr Percy. Immediately the boatman's tongue was loosed.

"Why, ay, sir, if you bees curous about *that* there gentleman, I can tell you a deal about him. But them as comes to see the new man does not covet to hear talk of the old master; but, nevertheless, there's none like him—he gave me and wife that there white cottage yonder, half-ways up the bank, where you see the smoke rising between the trees—as snug a cottage it is!——But that is no matter to you, sir. But I wish you had but *seed* him the night of the shipwreck, he and his son, God above bless him, and them—wherever they are, if they're above ground, I'd row out the worst night ever we had, to set my eyes on them again before I die, but for a minute. Ay, that night of the shipwreck, not a man was willing to go out with them, or could be got out the first turn, but myself."

Upon this text he spoke at large, entering into a most circumstantial and diffuse history of the shipwreck, mingling his own praises with those which he heartily bestowed upon the Percys of the right good

old branch. Commissioner Falconer meantime was not in a condition to throw in anything in favour of his new friend Sir Robert Percy; he was taking pinch after pinch of snuff, looking alternately at the water and the boat, sitting stiffly upright in anxious silence. Although in the incessant practice of suppressing his own feelings, corporeal and mental, from respect or complaisance to his superiors in rank and station, yet he presently found it beyond the utmost efforts of his courtly philosophy to endure his qualms of mind and body. Interrupting the talkative boatman, he first conjured the orator to mind what he was about; at last, Mr Falconer complaining of growing very sick, the count gave up all thoughts of proceeding farther, and begged the boatman to put them ashore as soon as they could. They landed near the village, which it was necessary that they should pass through, before they could reach the appointed place of meeting. The poor commissioner, whose stomach was still disordered, and whose head was giddy, observed that they had yet a long walk to take, and proposed sending for one of the carriages—accordingly they waited for it at the village inn. The commissioner, after having made a multitude of apologies to the count, retired to rest himself. During his absence the count, who, wherever he was, endeavoured to see as much as possible of the manners of the people, began talking to the landlord and landlady. Again the conversation turned upon the characters of the late and the present possessors of Percy Hall; and the good people, by all the anecdotes they told, and still more by the warm attachment they expressed for the old banished family, increased every moment his desire to be personally acquainted with those who in adversity were preferred to persons in present power and prosperity. Count Altenberg, young as he was,

had seen enough of the world to feel the full value of eulogiums bestowed on those who are poor, and who have no means of serving in any way the interests of their panegyrists.

When the carriage came, and the commissioner was sufficiently refitted for conversation, the count repeatedly expressed his earnest wish to become acquainted with that Mr Percy and his family, to whom his countrymen had been so much obliged, and of whom he said he had this morning heard so many interesting anecdotes. The commissioner had not been present when the count saw the picture of Caroline, nor indeed did he enter into Mrs Falconer's matrimonial designs for her daughter Georgiana. The commissioner generally saw the folly, and despaired of the success, of all castle-building but his own, and his castles in the air were always on a political plan. So without difficulty he immediately replied that nothing would give him more pleasure than to introduce the count to his relations, the Percys. The moment this was mentioned, however, to Mrs Falconer, the commissioner saw through the complacent countenance, with which she forced herself to listen to him, that he had made some terrible blunder, for which he should have to answer in private.

Accordingly the first moment they were alone, Mrs Falconer reproached him with the rash promise he had made. "I shall have all the difficulty in the world to put this out of the count's head. I thought, Mr Falconer, that you had agreed to let *those* Percys drop."

"So I would, if I could, my dear; but how can I, when Lord Oldborough persists in holding them up? —You must go and see them, my dear."

"I!" cried Mrs Falconer, with a look of horror; "I—not I, indeed! Lord Oldborough holds up only the gentlemen of the family—his lordship has nothing to do with the ladies, I suppose. Now, you know

visiting can go on vastly well, to all eternity, between the gentlemen of a family without the ladies having any sort of intimacy or acquaintance even. You and Mr Percy, if it is necessary for appearance' sake with Lord Oldborough—may continue upon the old footing; but I charge you, commissioner, do not involve me—and whatever happens, don't take Count Altenberg with you to the Hills."

"Why not, my dear?"

"My dear, I have my reasons. You were not in the gallery at Percy Hall this morning, when the count saw that painted glass window?"

The commissioner begged an explanation; but when he had heard all Mrs Falconer's reasons, they did not seem to strike him with the force she desired and expected.

"I will do as you please, my dear," said he, "and if I can, I will make the count forget my promised introduction to the Percys; but all the time, depend upon it, your fears and your hopes are both equally vain. You ladies are apt to take it for granted that men's heads are always running on love."

"Young men's heads sometimes are," said Mrs Falconer.

"Very seldom in these days," said the commissioner. "And love altogether, as one should think you might know by this time, Mrs Falconer—a sensible woman of the world, as you are; but no woman, even the most sensible, can ever believe it—love altogether has surprisingly little to do in the real management and business of the world."

"Surprisingly little," replied Mrs Falconer placidly. "But seriously, my dear, here is an opportunity of making an excellent match for Georgiana, if you will be so obliging as not to counteract me."

"I am the last man in the world to counteract you,

my dear; but it will never do," said Mr Falconer; "and you will only make Georgiana ridiculous, as she has been several times already, from the failure of these love-matches. I tell you, Mrs Falconer, Count Altenberg is no more thinking of love than I am—nor is he a man in the least likely to fall in love."

"He is more than half in love with my Georgiana already," said the mother, "if I have any eyes."

"You have eyes, and very fine eyes, my dear, as everybody knows, and no one better than myself—they have but one defect."

"Defect!"

"They sometimes see more than exists."

"You would not be so incredulous, Mr Falconer, if you had seen the rapture with which the count listens to Georgiana when she plays on the harp. He is prodigiously fond of music."

"And of painting too," said the commissioner; "for by your account of the matter, he seemed to have been more than half in love also with a picture this morning."

"A picture is no very dangerous rival, except in a *modern novel*," replied Mrs Falconer. "But beware, commissioner—and remember I understand these things—I warn you in time—beware of the original of that picture, and never again talk to me of going to see those Percys; for though the girl may be only an unfashioned country beauty, and Georgiana has so many polished advantages, yet there is no knowing what whim a young man might take into his head."

The commissioner, though he remained completely of his own opinion, that Mrs Falconer's scheme for Georgiana would never do, disputed the point no farther, but left the room, promising all she required, for promises cost him nothing. To do him justice, he recollected and endeavoured to the best of his power

to keep his word; for the next morning he took his time so well to propose a ride to the Hills, just at the moment when Lord Oldborough and the count were deep in a conversation on the state of Continental politics, that his lordship would not part with him. The commissioner paid his visit alone, and Mrs Falconer gave him credit for his address; but scarcely had she congratulated herself, when she was thrown again into terror—the commissioner had suggested to Lord Oldborough the propriety and policy of giving, whilst he was in the country, a *popularity ball!* His lordship assented, and Mrs Falconer, as usual, was to take the trouble off his hands, and to give an entertainment to his lordship's friends. Lord Oldborough had not yet recovered from the gout, and he was glad to accept of her offer: his lordship not being able to appear, or to do the honours of the fête, was a sufficient apology for his not giving it at Clermont Park.

The obsequious commissioner begged to have a list of any friends whom Lord Oldborough particularly wished to have invited; but his lordship, with a look of absence, replied, that he left all that entirely to Mrs Falconer: however, the very evening of the day on which the commissioner paid his visit alone at the Hills, Lord Oldborough put into his hands a list of the friends who he wished should be invited to the ball, and at the head of his list were the Percys.

"The Percys! the very people I first thought of!" said Mr Falconer, commanding his countenance carefully: "but I fear we cannot hope to have them, they are at such a distance, and they have no carriage."

"Any of my carriages, all of them, shall be at their command," said Lord Oldborough.

The commissioner reported this to Mrs Falconer, observing that he had gone to the very brink of

offending Lord Oldborough to oblige her, as he knew by his lordship's look and tone of voice; and that nothing now could be done, but to visit the Percys, and as soon as possible, and to send them a card of invitation for the ball.

"And, my dear, whatever you do, I am sure will be done with a good grace," added the commissioner, observing that his lady looked excessively discomfited.

"Very well, commissioner; you will have your daughter upon your hands, that's all."

"I should be as sorry for that, my love, as you could be; but what can be done? we must not lose the substance in running after the shadow. Lord Oldborough might turn short round upon us."

"Not the least likely upon such a trifling occasion as this, where no politics are in question. What can Mrs or Miss Percy's being or not being at this ball signify to Lord Oldborough?—a man who never in his life thought of balls or cared anything about women, and these are women whom he has never seen. What interest can it possibly be of Lord Oldborough's?"

"I cannot tell you, my dear—I don't see any immediate interest. But there's an old private friendship in the case. Some way or other, I declare I cannot tell you how, that old cousin Percy of mine has contrived to get nearer to Lord Oldborough than any one living ever could do—nearer to his heart."

"Heart!—Private friendship!" repeated Mrs Falconer, with a tone of ineffable contempt. "Well, I only wish you had said nothing about the matter to Lord Oldborough; I could have managed it myself. Was there ever such want of address! When you saw the Percys at the head of the list, was that a time to say anything about your fears of their not coming? Do you think Lord Oldborough could not translate

fears into hopes? Then to mention their having no carriages!—when, if you had kept your own counsel, that would have been our sufficient excuse at last. They must have refused: nothing need have been said about it till the night of the ball; and I would lay my life, Lord Oldborough would never, in the meantime, have thought of it, or of them. But so silly! to object in that way, when you know that the slightest contradiction wakens Lord Oldborough's will; and then indeed you might as well talk to his own Jupiter Tonans. If his lordship had set a beggar-woman's name at the head of his list, and you had objected that she had no carriage, he would directly have answered 'She shall have mine.' Bless me! It's wonderful that people can pique themselves on address, and have so little knowledge of character."

"My dear," said the commissioner, "if you reproach me from this time till to-morrow, the end of the matter will be, that you must go and see the Percys. I say, Mrs Falconer," added he, assuming a peremptory tone, for which he had acquired a taste from Lord Oldborough, but had seldom courage or opportunity to indulge in it, "I say, Mrs Falconer, the thing must be done." He rang the bell in a gloriously authoritative manner, and ordered the carriage.

A visit paid thus upon compulsion was not likely to be very agreeable; but the complaints against the roads, the dreadful distance, and the horrid necessity of being civil, need not be recorded. Miss Falconers exclaimed when they at last came to the Hills, "La! I did not think it was so tolerable a place!" Miss Georgiana hoped that they should, at least, see Miss Caroline—she owned she was curious to see that beautiful original, of whom the painter at Percy Hall, and her brother Buckhurst, had said so much.

Mrs Percy and Rosamond only were at home. Caroline had taken a walk with her father to a considerable distance.

Mrs Falconer, who had, by this time, completely recovered her self-command, presented herself with such smiling grace, and expressed, in such a tone of cordiality, her earnest desire, now that she had been so happy as to get into the country, to enjoy the society of her friends and relations, that Rosamond was quite charmed into a belief of at least half of what she said. Rosamond was willing to attribute all that had appeared, particularly of late, in contradiction of this lady's present professions, to some political motives of commissioner Falconer, whom she disliked for his conduct to Buckhurst, and whom she was completely willing to give up as a worldly-minded courtier. But whilst the manners of the mother operated thus with Rosamond in favour of her moral character, even Rosamond's easy faith and sanguine benevolence could not see or hear anything from the daughters that confirmed Mrs Falconer's flattering speeches; they sat in languid silence, looking upon the animate and inanimate objects in the room with the same air of supercilious listlessness. They could not speak so as to be heard, they could not really understand anything that Rosamond said to them; they seemed as if their bodies had been brought into the room by mistake, and their souls left behind them: not that they were in the least timid or abashed; no, they seemed fully satisfied with their own inanity, and proud to show that they had absolutely no ideas in common with those into whose company they had been thus unfortunately compelled. Once or twice they turned their heads with some signs of vivacity, when the door opened, and when they expected to see Miss Caroline Percy enter: but though the visit was protracted, in hopes of her return, yet at last they

were obliged to depart without having their curiosity satisfied.

Mrs Falconer's fears of rivalship for her Georgiana were not diminished by this visit. By those of the family whom she saw this day, she judged of Caroline, whom she had not seen; and she had tact sufficient to apprehend, that the conversation and manners of Mrs Percy and of Rosamond were such as might, perhaps, please a well-bred and well-informed foreigner, better, even, than the fashionable tone and air of the day, of which he had not been long enough in England to appreciate the conventional value. Still Mrs Falconer had a lingering hope that some difficulties about dress, or some happy cold, might prevent these dangerous Percys from accepting the invitation to the ball. When their answers to her card came, she gave one hasty glance at it.

"Will do themselves the honour."

"My dear, you are alarming yourself unnecessarily," cried the commissioner, who pitied the distress visible, at least to his eyes, in her countenance; or who feared, perhaps, a renewal of reproaches for his own want of address, "quite unnecessarily, believe me. I have had a great deal of conversation with Count Altenberg since I spoke of him to you last, and I am confirmed in my opinion that he merely feels the curiosity natural to an enlightened traveller to become acquainted with Mr Percy, a man who has been described to him as a person of abilities. And he wants to thank him in the name of his countrymen, who were assisted, you know I told you, by the Percys, at the time of the shipwreck. You will see, my dear, that the ladies of the family will be nothing to him."

Mrs Falconer sighed, and bit her lips.

"In half-an-hour's conversation, I would engage to find out the ruling passion of any man, young or old.

Now, remember I tell you, Mrs Falconer, Count Altenberg's ruling passion is ambition."

"Ruling passion!" repeated Mrs Falconer; "one of your book-words, and book-notions, that are always misleading you in practice. Ruling passion!—Metaphysical nonsense! As if men were such consistent creatures as to be ruled regularly by one passion—when often ten different passions pull a man, even before your face, ten different ways, and one cannot tell one hour what will be the ruling passion of the next. Tell me the reigning fashion, and I will tell you the ruling passion!—Luckily," continued Mrs Falconer, after a pause of deep consideration, "Georgiana is very fashionable — one of the most fashionable young women in England, as the count might have seen when he was in London. But then, on the other hand, whether he is judge enough of English manners —— Georgiana must be well dressed—and I know the count's taste in dress; I have made myself mistress of that—commissioner, I must trouble you for some money."

"Mrs Falconer, I have no money; and if I had," said the commissioner, who always lost his temper when that subject was touched upon, "if I had, I would not give it to you to throw away upon such a losing game—a nonsensical speculation! Georgiana has not the least chance, nor has any other English woman, were she as handsome as Venus and dressed in bank notes—why, Mrs Falconer, since you put me in a passion, I must tell you a secret."

But checking himself, Mr Falconer stood for a moment silent, and went on with "Count Altenberg has made up his quarrel with the hereditary prince, and I have it from undoubted authority, that he is to be the prince's prime minister when he comes to the throne; and the present prince, you know, as Cunning-

ham says, is so infirm and asthmatic, that he may be carried off at any moment."

"Very well—very likely—I am glad of it," said Mrs Falconer: "but where's the secret?"

"I've thought better of that, and I cannot tell it to you. But this much I tell you positively, Mrs Falconer, that you will lose your labour, if you speculate upon the count for Georgiana."

"Is he married? Answer me that question, and I will ask no more—and that I have a right to ask."

"No—not married; but I can tell no more. Only let me beg that you will just put all love notions out of Georgiana's head and your own, or you'll make the girl ridiculous, and expose yourself, my dear. But, on the other hand, let there be no deficiency of attention to the count, for all our civilities to him will pay a hundredfold, and, perhaps, sooner than you expect —for he may be prime minister and prime favourite at Cunningham's court in a month, and of course will have it in his power to forward Cunningham's interests. That is what I look to, Mrs Falconer; for I am long-sighted in my views, as you will find."

"Well, time will show. I am glad you tell me he positively is not married," concluded Mrs Falconer: "as to the rest, we shall see."

Chapter xxvi.

THE evening appointed for Mrs Falconer's ball at length arrived; and all the neighbouring gentry assembled at Falconer Court. They were received by Mrs Falconer in a splendid salon, new furnished for this occasion, which displayed in

its decorations the utmost perfection of modern taste and magnificence.

Mrs Falconer was fitted, both by art and nature, to adorn a ball-room, and conduct a ball. With that ease of manner which a perfect knowledge of the world and long practice alone can give, she floated round the circle, conscious that she was in her element. Her eye, with one glance, seemed to pervade the whole assembly; her ear divided itself amongst a multitude of voices; and her attention diffused itself over all with equal grace. Yet that attention, universal as it seemed, was nicely discriminative. Mistress of the art of pleasing, and perfectly acquainted with all the shades of politeness, she knew how to dispose them so as to conceal their boundaries, and even their gradation, from all but the most skilful observers. They might, indeed, have formed, from Mrs Falconer's reception of each of her guests, an exact estimate of their rank, fashion, and consequence in the world; for by these standards she regulated her opinion, and measured her regard. Every one present knew this to be her theory, and observed it to be her practice towards others; but each flattered themselves by turns that they discovered in her manner a personal exception in their own favour. In the turn of her countenance, the tone of her voice, her smile or her anxiety, in her distant respect or her affectionate familiarity, some distinction was discerned peculiar to each individual.

The Miss Falconers, stationary at one end of the room, seemed to have adopted manners diametrically opposite to those of their mother: attraction being the principle of the mother, repulsion of the daughters. Encircled amongst a party of young female friends, Miss Falconers, with high-bred airs, confined to their own *coterie* their exclusive attention.

They left to their mother the responsibility and all the labour of *doing the honours* of her own house, whilst they enjoyed the glory of being remarked and *wondered at* by half the company; a circumstance which, far from embarrassing, seemed obviously to increase their gaiety.

The ball could not begin till the band of a regiment, quartered in the neighbourhood, arrived. Whilst they were waiting for the music, the Miss Falconers and their party stationed themselves directly opposite to the entrance of the salon, so as to have a full view of the antechamber through which the company were to pass —no one passed uncensured by this confederacy. The first coup-d'œil decided the fate of all who appeared, and each of the fair judges vied with the others in the severity of the sentence pronounced on the unfortunate persons who thus came before their merciless tribunal.

"But I am astonished the Percys do not make their appearance," cried Miss Georgiana Falconer.

"Has Sir Robert Percy any one with him?" asked one of the young ladies.

"I am not speaking of Sir Robert Percy," replied Miss Georgiana, "but of the other branch, the fallen branch of the Percys—our relations too—but we know nothing of them—only mamma was obliged to ask them for to-night——And, Bell, only conceive how horribly provoking! because they come, we sha'n't have Sir Robert Percy—just sent to excuse himself."

"Abominable! Now, really!—And for people quite out of the world, that nobody ever heard of, except Lord Oldborough, who, ages ago, had some political connexion, I think they say, with the father," said Miss Arabella.

"No, they met abroad, or something of that sort," replied Miss Georgiana.

"Was that it? Very likely—I know nothing about them: I only wish they had staid at home, where they are so fond of staying, I hear. You know, Georgiana, Buckhurst told us, that when they had something to live upon they never lived like other people, but always were buried alive in the country; and Lady Jane Granville, with her own lips, told me, that, even since they lost their fortune, she had asked one of these girls to town with her and to Tunbridge—Now only conceive how kind! and what an advantage that would have been—And, can you believe it? Mr Percy was so unaccountable, and they all so odd, that they refused—Lady Jane, of course, will never ask them again. But now, must not they be the silliest creatures in the universe?"

"Silly! Oh! dear no: there you are wrong, Bell; for you know they are all so wise, and so learned, so blue, such a deep blue, and all that sort of thing, that, for my part, I shall never dare to open my lips before them."

"Fortunately," said one of the young ladies, "you have not much to fear from their learning at a ball; and as dancers I don't apprehend you have much to dread from any of them, even from *the beauty*."

"Why, scarcely," said Miss Georgiana: "I own I shall be curious to see how they will *get on*—'*comment ces savantes se tireront d'affaire*. I wonder they are not here. Keep your eye on the door, dear Lady Frances—I would not miss their entrée for millions."

In vain eyes and glasses were fixed in expectation of the arrival of these devoted objects of ridicule—another, and another, and another came, but not the Percys.

The band was now ready, and began to play—Count Altenberg entered the room. Quick as grace can venture to move, Mrs Falconer glided to receive him.

Miss Georgiana Falconer, at the same moment, composed her features into their most becoming position, and gave herself a fine air of the head. The count bowed to her—she fanned herself, and her eye involuntarily glanced, first at a brilliant star he wore, and then at her mother, whilst, with no small degree of anxiety, she prepared to play off, on this decisive evening, all her artillery, to complete her conquest—to complete her victory, for she flattered herself that only the finishing blow was wanting. In this belief her female companions contributed to confirm her, though probably they were all the time laughing at her vanity.

Mrs Falconer requested Count Altenberg to open the ball with Lady Frances Arlington. After having obeyed her orders, he next led out Miss Georgiana Falconer, evidently to her satisfaction; the more so, as she was conscious of being, at that moment, the envy of at least half the company.

Count Altenberg, quite unconscious of being himself the object of any attention, seemed to think only of showing his partner to advantage; if he danced well, it appeared to be only because he habitually moved with ease and dignity, and that whatever he did he looked like a gentleman. His fair partner danced admirably, and now surpassed herself.

It was repeated to Mrs Falconer, that Colonel Bremen, the count's friend, had told some one that the count had declared he had never seen anything equal to Miss Georgiana Falconer, except at the opera at Paris. At this triumphant moment Miss Georgiana could have seen, with security and complacency, the arrival of Miss Caroline Percy. The more prudent mother, however, was well satisfied with her absence. Everything conspired to Mrs Falconer's satisfaction. The ball was far advanced, and no Percys appeared. Mrs Falconer wondered, and deplored, and at length it came near the

hour when supper was ordered—the commissioner inquired whether Mrs Falconer was certain that she had named the right day on the card?

"Oh! certain——But it is now so late, I am clear they will not be here to-night."

"Very extraordinary, to keep Lord Oldborough's carriage and servants!" said the commissioner: "they went in time, I am sure, for I saw them set out."

"All I know is, that we have done everything that is proper," said Mrs Falconer, "and Lord Oldborough cannot blame us—as to the count, he seems quite *content.*"

Mrs Falconer's accent seemed to imply something more than *content;* but this was not a proper time or place to contest the point. The husband passed on, saying to himself "Absurd!" The wife went on, saying "Obstinate!"

Count Altenberg had led his partner to a seat, and as soon as he quitted her, the young ladies of her party all flattered her, in congratulatory whispers: one observed that there was certainly something very particular in Count Altenberg's manner, when he first spoke to Miss Georgiana Falconer; another remarked that he always spoke to Miss Georgiana Falconer with emotion and embarrassment; a third declared that her eye was fixed upon the count, and she saw him several times change colour—all, in short, agreed that the count's heart was Miss Georgiana Falconer's devoted prize. She the while, with well-affected incredulity and secret complacency, half repressed and half encouraged these remarks by frequent exclamations of "La! how can you think so!—Why will you say such things!—Dear! how can you be so tormenting—so silly, now, to have such fancies!—But did he really change colour?"—In love with her! She wondered how such an idea could ever come into their heads—

she should, for her part, never have dreamed of such a thing—indeed, she was positive they were mistaken. Count Altenberg in love with her!—O no, there could be nothing in it.

Whilst she spoke, her eyes followed the count, who, quite unconscious of his danger, undisturbed by any idea of Miss Georgiana Falconer and love, two ideas which probably never had entered his mind together, was carelessly walking down the room, his thoughts apparently occupied with the passing scene. He had so much the habit of observing men and manners, without appearing to observe them, that, under an air of gaiety, he carried his understanding, as it were, incognito. His observation glanced on all the company as he passed. Miss Georgiana Falconer lost sight of him as he reached the end of the saloon; he disappeared in the antechamber.

Soon afterwards a report reached her that the Percy family were arrived; that Count Altenberg had been particularly struck by the sight of one of the Miss Percys, and had been overheard to whisper to his friend Colonel Bremen, "Very like the picture! but still more *mind* in the countenance!"

At hearing this, Miss Georgiana Falconer grew first red and then turned pale; Mrs Falconer, though scarcely less confounded, never changed a muscle of her face, but leaving everybody to choose their various comments upon the count's words, and simply saying, "Are the Percys come at last?" she won her easy way through the crowd, whispering to young Petcalf as she passed, "Now is your time, Petcalf, my good creature—Georgiana is disengaged."

Before Mrs Falconer got to the antechamber, another report met her, "that the Percys had been overturned, and had been terribly hurt."

"Overturned!—terribly hurt!—Good heavens!"

cried Mrs Falconer, as she entered the antechamber. But the next person told her they were not in the least hurt — still pressing forward, she exclaimed, "Mrs Percy! Where is Mrs Percy? My dear madam! what has happened? Come the wrong road, did you?—broken bridge—And were you really overturned?"

"No, no, only obliged to get out and walk a little way."

"Oh! I am sorry——But I am so glad to see you all safe!——When it grew late I grew so uneasy!" Then turning towards Caroline, "Miss Caroline Percy, I am sure, though I had never, till now, the pleasure of seeing her."

An introduction of Caroline by Mrs Percy, in due form, took place. Mrs Falconer next recognised Mr Percy, declared he did not look a day older than when she had seen him fifteen years before—then recurring to the ladies, "But, my dear Mrs Percy, are you sure that your shoes are not wet through?—Oh! my dear madam, Miss Percy's are terribly wet! and Miss Caroline's! Positively, the young ladies must go to my dressing-room—the shoes must be dried!" Mrs Falconer said that perhaps her daughters could accommodate the Miss Percys with others.

It was in vain that Rosamond protested her shoes were not wet, and that her sister's were perfectly dry; a few specks on their white justified Mrs Falconer's apprehensions.

"Where is my Arabella? If there was anybody I could venture to trouble——"

Count Altenberg instantly offered his services.

"Impossible to trouble you, count! But since you are so very good, perhaps you could find one of my daughters for me—Miss Falconer—if you are so kind, sir—Georgiana I am afraid is dancing."

Miss Falconer was found, and despatched with the Miss Percys, in spite of all they could say to the contrary, to Mrs Falconer's dressing-room. Rosamond was permitted, without much difficulty, to do as she pleased; but Mrs Falconer's infinite fears lest Caroline should catch her death of cold could not be appeased, till she had submitted to change her shoes.

"Caroline!" said Rosamond, in a low voice, "Caroline! do not put on those shoes—they are too large—you will never be able to dance in them."

"I know that—but I am content. It is better to yield than to debate the point any longer," said Caroline.

When they returned to the ball-room, Count Altenberg was in earnest conversation with Mr Percy; but Mrs Falconer observed that the count saw Miss Caroline Percy the moment she reappeared.

"Now is not it extraordinary," thought she, "when Georgiana dances so well! is infinitely more fashionable, and so charmingly dressed!—What can strike him so much in this girl's appearance?"

It was not her appearance that struck him. He was too well accustomed to see beauty and fashion in public places to be caught at first sight by a handsome face, or by a young lady's exhibition of her personal graces at a ball; but a favourable impression had been made on his mind by what he had previously heard of Miss Caroline Percy's conduct and character: her appearance confirmed this impression precisely, because she had not the practised air of a professed beauty, because she did not seem in the least to be thinking of herself, or to expect admiration. This was really uncommon, and, therefore, it fixed the attention of a man like Count Altenberg. He asked Caroline to dance; she declined dancing. Mr Temple

engaged Rosamond, and the moment he led her away, the count availed himself of her place, and a conversation commenced, which soon made Mrs Falconer regret that Caroline had declined dancing. Though the count was a stranger to the Percy family, yet there were many subjects of common interest of which he knew how to avail himself. He began by speaking of Mr Alfred Percy, of the pleasure he had had in becoming acquainted with him, of the circumstance which led to this acquaintance: then he passed to Lord Oldborough—to M. de Tourville—to the shipwreck. He paused at Percy Hall, for he felt for those to whom he was speaking. They understood him, but they did not avoid the subject; he then indulged himself in the pleasure of repeating some of the expressions of attachment to their old landlord, and of honest affection and gratitude, which he had heard from the peasants in the village.

Mrs Falconer moved away the moment she foresaw this part of the conversation, but she was only so far removed as to prevent the necessity of her taking any part in it, or of appearing to hear what it might be awkward for her to hear, considering her intimacy with Sir Robert Percy. She began talking to an old lady about her late illness, of which she longed to hear from her own lips all the particulars; and whilst the old lady told her case, Mrs Falconer, with eyes fixed upon her, and making, at proper intervals, all the appropriate changes of countenance requisite to express tender sympathy, alarm, horror, astonishment, and joyful congratulation, contrived, at the same time, through the whole progress of fever, and the administration of half the medicines in the London Pharmacopœia, to hear everything that was said by Count Altenberg, and not to lose a word that was uttered by Caroline. Mrs Falconer was particularly anxious to know what would

be said about the picture in the gallery at Percy Hall, with which the count had been so much charmed. When he got into the gallery, Mrs Falconer listened with breathless eagerness, yet still smiling on the old lady's never-ending history of her convalescence, and of a shawl undoubtedly Turkish, with the true, inestimable, inimitable, little border.

Not a word was said of the picture—but a pause implied more to alarm Mrs Falconer than could have been expressed by the most flattering compliment.

Mrs Falconer wondered why supper was so late. She sent to order that it might be served as soon as possible; but her man, or her gentleman cook, was not a person to be hurried. Three successive messengers were sent in vain. He knew his importance, and preserved his dignity. The caramel was not ready, and nothing could make him dispense with its proper appearance.

How much depended on this caramel! How much, of which the cook never dreamed! How much Mrs Falconer suffered during this half-hour, and suffered with a smiling countenance! How much, with a scowling brow, Miss Georgiana Falconer made poor Petcalf endure!

Everything conspired to discomfit Mrs Falconer. She saw the manner in which all the principal gentry in the country, one after another, expressed satisfaction at meeting the Percy family. She saw the regard and respect with which they were addressed, notwithstanding their loss of fortune and station. It was quite astonishing to Mrs Falconer. Everybody in the rooms, except her own set of town friends, seemed *so strangely* interested about this family. "How provoking that I was obliged to ask them here!—And Count Altenberg sees and hears all this!"

Yes—all this confirmed, by the testimony of their

equals in rank, the favourable ideas he had first received of the Percys from their inferiors and dependants. Every person who spoke to or of Caroline—and he heard many speak of her who had known her from childhood—showed affection in their countenance and manner.

At length, supper was announced, and Mrs Falconer requested Count Altenberg would take Lady Frances Arlington into the supper-room. Miss Georgiana Falconer was anxious to sit as near as possible to her dear Lady Frances, and this was happily accomplished.

The count was more than usually agreeable: but whether this arose from his desire to please the ladies who sat beside him, or those who sat opposite to him, those to whom he was in politeness bound to address his conversation, or those whose attention he might hope it would attract, were questions of difficult solution.

As they were returning into the ball-room, Rosamond watched her opportunity, made her way along a passage which led to Mrs Falconer's dressing-room, seized her sister's shoes, returned with the prize before Caroline reached the antechamber, and unseen by all, made her put them on——"Now promise me not to refuse to dance, if you are asked again."

Count Altenberg engaged Miss Georgiana Falconer the first two dances—when these were finished, he asked Caroline to dance, and Mrs Falconer, who dreaded the renewal of conversation between them, and who knew nothing of Rosamond's counter-manœuvre about the shoes, was surprised and rejoiced when she saw Caroline comply, and suffer herself to be led out by Count Altenberg. But Miss Georgiana, who had observed that Rosamond danced well, had fears—the mother's hopes were disappointed, the daughter's fears were justified. Caroline showed all the capability of

dancing without being a dancer, and it certainly did not escape the count's observation that she possessed what is most desirable in female accomplishments, the power to excel without the wish to display. Immediately after she had finished these dances, the favour of her hand was solicited by a certain Colonel Spandrill. Colonel Spandrill, celebrated for his fashionable address and personal accomplishments, had been the hoped-for partner of many rival ladies, and his choice excited no small degree of emotion. However, it was settled that he only danced with Miss Percy because Mrs Falconer had made it her particular request. One of these ladies declared she had overheard that request; Colonel Spandrill then was safe from all blame, but the full fire of their resentment was directed against poor Caroline. Every feature of her face was criticised, and even the minutiæ of her dress. They all allowed that she was handsome, but each found some different fault with her style of beauty. It was curious to observe how this secondary class of young ladies, who had without discomfiture or emotion seen Caroline the object of Count Altenberg's attention, were struck with indignation the moment they suspected her of pleasing Colonel Spandrill. Envy seldom takes two steps at once: it is always excited by the fear of losing the proximate object of ambition; it never exists without some mixture of hope as well as of fear. These ladies having no hope of captivating Count Altenberg, Caroline did not then appear to be their rival; but now that they dreaded her competition with a man whom they had hopes of winning, they pulled her to pieces without mercy.

The Miss Falconers and their quadrille-set were resting themselves, whilst this country dance was going on. Miss Georgiana was all the time endeavouring to engage Count Altenberg in conversation.

By all the modern arts of coquetry, so insipid to a man of the world, so contemptible to a man of sense, she tried to recall the attention of the count. Politeness obliged him to seem to listen, and he endeavoured to keep up that kind of conversation which is suited to a ball-room; but he relapsed continually into reverie, till at last, provoked by his absence of mind, Miss Georgiana, unable to conceal her vexation, unjustly threw the blame upon her health. She complained of the headache, of heat, of cold, of country dances—such barbarous things!—How could any one bear anything but quadrilles? Then the music — the band was horrid!—they played vastly too fast—shocking! there was no such thing as keeping time—did not Count Altenberg think so?

Count Altenberg was at that moment beating time with his foot, in exact cadence to Miss Caroline Percy's dancing: Miss Falconer saw this, but not till she had uttered her question, not till it had been observed by all her companions. Lady Frances Arlington half smiled, and half a smile instantly appeared along a whole line of young ladies. Miss Georgiana suddenly became sensible that she was exposed to the ridicule or sarcastic pity of those who but an hour before had flattered her in the grossest manner: she had expected to produce a great effect at this ball—she saw another preferred. Her spirits sunk, and even the powers of affectation failed. The struggle between the fine lady and the woman ceased. Passion always conquers art at a *coup de main*. When any strong emotion of the soul is excited, the natural character, temper, and manners, seldom fail to break through all that is factitious—those who had seen Miss Georgiana Falconer only through the veil of affectation were absolutely astonished at the change that appeared when it was thrown aside. By the

count the metamorphosis was unnoticed, for he was intent on another object; but by many of the spectators it was beheld with open surprise, or secret contempt. She exhibited at this moment the picture of a disappointed coquette—the spasm of jealousy had seized her heart; and, unable to conceal or endure the pain in this convulsion of mind, she forgot all grace and decorum. Her mother from afar saw the danger at this crisis, and came to her relief. The danger in Mrs Falconer's opinion was, that the young lady's want of temper should be seen by Count Altenberg; she therefore carried him off to a distant part of the room, to show him, as she said, "a bassoon player, who was the exact image of Hogarth's enraged musician."

In the meantime Colonel Spandrill and Caroline had finished their dance; and the colonel, who made it a principle to engross the attention of the prettiest woman in the room, was now, after his manner, paying his adorations to his fair partner. Promising himself that he should be able to recede or advance as he thought proper, he used a certain happy ambiguity of phrase, which, according to the manner in which it is understood, or rather according to the tone and look with which it is accompanied, says everything—or nothing. With prudent caution, he began with darts, flames, wounds, and anguish; words which every military man holds himself privileged to use towards every fine woman he meets. Darts, flames, wounds, and anguish, were of no avail. The colonel went on, as far as bright eyes—bewitching smiles—and heavenly grace. Still without effect. With astonishment he perceived that the girl, who looked as if she had never heard that she was handsome, received the full fire of his flattery with the composure of a veteran inured to public admiration.

Mrs Falconer was almost as much surprised and disappointed by this as the colonel could be. She had purposely introduced the gallant Colonel Spandrill to the Miss Percys, in hopes that Caroline's head might be *affected* by flattery; and that she might not then retain all that dignity of manner which, as Mrs Falconer had sense enough to see, was her distinguishing charm in the eyes of the count. Frustrated, and dreading every instant that with all her address she should not be able to manage her Georgiana's temper, Mrs Falconer became excessively impatient for the departure of the Percy family.

"Mr Falconer!" cried she; "Commissioner! Mrs Percy ordered her carriage a considerable time ago. They have a great way to return, and a dreadful road —I am uneasy about them—do, pray, be so good to see what detains her carriage."

The commissioner went out of the room, and a few minutes afterwards returned, and taking Mrs Falconer aside, said, "I have something to tell you, my dear, that will surprise you—indeed I can scarcely believe it. Long as I have known Lord Oldborough, I never knew him do or think of doing such a thing—and he ill—at least ill enough with the gout, for an excuse—an excuse he thought sufficient for the whole county —and there are people of so much more consequence ——I protest I cannot understand it."

"Understand what, commissioner?—Will you tell me what has happened, and you may be as much surprised as you please afterwards? Lord Oldborough has the gout," added she, in an accent which expressed "*Well, all the world knows that.*"

"Lord Oldborough's own confidential man Rodney, you know——"

"Well, well, Rodney, I do know—what of him?"

"He is here—I have seen him this instant—from

his lord, with a message to Mr Percy, to let him know that there are apartments prepared for him and all his family at Clermont Park; and that he insists upon their not returning this night to the Hills, lest the ladies should be tired."

"Lord Oldborough!" repeated Mrs Falconer; "Lord Oldborough!—the ladies!—Clermont Park! where none but persons of the first distinction are invited!"

"Ay, now you are surprised," cried the commissioner.

"Surprised! beyond all power of expression," said Mrs Falconer.

"Beyond all power of dissimulation," she should have said.

"Count Altenberg, too, going to hand them to their carriage—going to Clermont Park with them! —I wish to Heaven," said Mrs Falconer to herself, "I had never given this unfortunate ball!"

Mrs Falconer was mistaken in this idea. It was not the circumstance of meeting Caroline at a ball that made this impression on Count Altenberg; wherever he had seen her, if he had had opportunity of conversing, and of observing the dignity and simplicity of her manner, the same effect would have been produced —but in fact, Mrs Falconer's fears, and her daughter's jealousy, had much magnified the truth. Count Altenberg had not, as they fancied, fallen desperately in love at first sight with Caroline—he had only been pleased, and interested sufficiently to make him desirous to see more of her. Caroline, though so much the object of jealousy, had not the slightest idea that she had made a conquest—she simply thought the count's conversation agreeable, and she was glad that she should see him again at breakfast the next morning.

Chapter xxvij.

MR and Mrs Percy accepted of Lord Oldborough's invitation. They found apartments prepared for them at Clermont Park, and servants ready to attend, with the officious promptitude with which a great man's domestics usually wait upon those who are supposed to stand high in their master's favour.

During his illness Lord Oldborough had always breakfasted in his own room; but his lordship appeared at the breakfast-table the morning after the ball, ready to receive his guests. Nothing could be more gracious, more polite, more kind, than his reception of Mr Percy and his family. From the moment he was introduced to the wife and daughters of his friend, he seemed to throw aside the reserve and coldness of his manner—to forget at once the statesman and the minister, the affairs of Europe and the intrigues of the Cabinet—to live entirely for the present moment and the present company. The company consisted of the Percy family, Count Altenberg, and Mr Temple. It was a common practice with Lord Oldborough to set conversation a-going, then to become silent, and retire to his own thoughts —he would just throw the ball, and leave others to run for it. But now he condescended at least to join in the pursuit, though apparently without ambition to obtain distinction in the race. After breakfast he showed the ladies into his library; and, as he was himself disabled, requested Mr Temple to take down such books or prints as he thought most worthy of their attention. Literature had been neglected, perhaps undervalued, by Lord Oldborough, since he had devoted himself to politics; but he could at will recall the classical stores of his youth; and on modern books his quick eye and ear, joined to his strong and rapid judgment, enabled him to decide better than many

who make it the only business of their lives to read. Even Mr Percy, who knew him best, was surprised; and still more surprised was Mr Temple, who had seen him in varieties of company, some of the highest rank and fashion both in wit and literature, where his lordship had appeared either absent of mind or a silent listener; but he now exerted those powers of conversation which he usually suffered to lie dormant. Instead of waiting in proud expectation that those who were in his company should prove their claims to his attention, he now produced his own intellectual treasures; evidently not for the vanity of display, but to encourage his guests to produce those talents which he seemed to take it for granted that they possessed. It appeared to be his sole object, his pride and pleasure, to pay attention to the wife and daughters of his friend; and to show them and him to advantage to an illustrious foreigner.

"Yes," said he, apart to Count Altenberg, "I am proud to show you a specimen of a cultivated independent country gentleman and his family."

With his usual penetration, Lord Oldborough soon discerned the characteristics of each of the ladies of this family—the good sense and good breeding of Mrs Percy, the wit and generous simplicity of Rosamond, the magnanimity and the superior understanding of Caroline. As instances of these different qualities appeared, his quick and brightening eye marked his approbation, sometimes by a glance at Count Altenberg, by a nod to Mr Temple, or by a congratulatory smile as he turned to Mr Percy.

"I now comprehend," said his lordship, "why Mr Percy could never be induced to take a part in public business. Ladies, you have done a great injury to your country—you have made this gentleman too happy in domestic life."

Lord Oldborough spoke this in a tone of raillery, and with a smile—but the smile was succeeded by a deep sigh, and a dark gloom of countenance. At this moment one of the secretaries, Mr Shaw, came in with papers to be signed. The minister reappeared. Lord Oldborough's mind turned instantly to business: he withdrew to a table apart, sat down, and began to look over the first paper that was laid before him. Mr Percy rang the bell, and something was said about not intruding on his lordship's time—he looked up: "Mr Temple, you are free. Mr Shaw shall finish whatever letters it is necessary should be written this morning. You shall have the pleasure of being with your friends. It is a pleasure you deserve, sir, and can appreciate. Mrs Percy expressed a wish to see the grounds—you will show them to these ladies. I am a prisoner still," said his lordship, looking down at his gouty hand, "and always shall be a prisoner," added he, turning his eye upon the papers which Mr Shaw held.

The ladies, accompanied by Mr Temple, and by Count Altenberg, went out to walk. Mr Percy staid one moment to express his sense of the extraordinary politeness and kindness with which Lord Oldborough had honoured him and his family.

"You owe me no thanks, my dear sir. Kindness can be repaid only by kindness. It is a species of debt, which in the course of my life I have seldom been called upon to pay."

This was said not in a voice either of sentiment or of compliment, but rather in an austere tone, and with a stern countenance of conquered emotion. Without looking at Mr Percy, he received and answered the farewell shake of the hand; his lips were instantly after strongly compressed; and, taking up his pen, the man was again absorbed in the minister.

Mr Percy joined the party who were going to walk

in the park. Count Altenberg had been unusually silent in Lord Oldborough's company: with the becoming deference of a young man, in the presence of one superior in age, and in high situation, he had listened eager to learn, instead of impatient to talk. Attention of course now turned upon him, as the stranger and the foreigner.

With the same perfect taste and good-breeding with which he knew how to pay honour due, he received it, and appeared as much at his ease whether he was in the shade or the light, whether he was unnoticed or the object of general attention. He had that air of self-possession, which characterizes a person secure of his own resources, and not afraid to produce his abilities.

The conversation turned at first upon the beauties of nature—Clermont Park was one of the really magnificent places in England which an Englishman may feel proud to show to a foreigner.

Count Altenberg politely and justly observed how different the country seats of our nobility are from the ruinous and comfortless *chateaux* of most of the French nobility.

Clermont Park, however, was not new to the count. Commissioner Falconer had the day after his arrival shown him everything that was to be seen: his attention, therefore, as they pursued their walk, was not so much distracted by external objects, as to prevent him from wishing to converse. Finding that Mr Percy had travelled, he spoke of Switzerland and Italy; and, without any of the jargon of a connoisseur, showed that he felt with sensibility and enthusiasm the beautiful and sublime. It soon appeared that he had seen various countries, not merely with the eye of a painter and a poet, but of a philosophical traveller, who can allow for the differences

of national taste, and discern how its variations are influenced by climate, education, government, and local circumstances. In his rapid panorama of foreign countries, he showed variety of knowledge, and without illiberal prejudice against any nation, an amiable predilection for his native country. Next to his own country he preferred England, which, as he said, by the mother's side he might call his own. She had early instilled into him an admiration for our free constitution, and a love of our domestic habits; but he had never before visited this country, and he was particularly desirous to obtain an accurate knowledge of England, and of the manners and modes of life of its inhabitants. He seemed thus eager to obtain information, not merely to gratify a cursory or selfish curiosity, but with a view to the future, and with a hope of doing permanent good. It was clear that he was not only a philosophical but a benevolent traveller, to whom nothing that concerns his fellow-creatures is foreign or indifferent. His treasuring up all he had seen abroad, that could be useful at home, reminded Caroline of Colonel Hungerford; but she observed that Count Altenberg's views were more enlarged; he was unbiassed by professional habits; his sphere of action was higher; heir to extensive property, with all the foreign rights of territorial dominion hereditarily his; and with a probability of obtaining the political power of ministerial station; plans, which in other circumstances might have been romantic, with Count Albert's prospects and abilities, were within the bounds of sound judgment and actual practicability. But whatever these intentions might be, they were only to be inferred from his conversation; he scarcely spoke of himself, or of his own designs; whatever he was led to say on such subjects, he seemed, immediately after he had said it, to feel as an

impropriety, not justified by the slight interest which the acquaintance of a few hours could inspire.

He changed the conversation by asking some questions about a celebrated English writer. In return for the information Mr Percy gave him, he spoke of some recent foreign publications—related several anecdotes of literary foreigners. His anecdotes were interesting, because, in each, there was something characteristic of the individual, or illustrative of some general principle of human nature. To gratify Mr Percy, the count spoke of some public events of which he had had means of obtaining information. He had not neglected any of the opportunities he enjoyed, and whether he talked of civil or military affairs, he showed the same *efficient* knowledge, and the same superior ability.

Caroline, leaning on her father's arm, listened with a countenance full of intelligence, animation, and sympathy; she looked alternately at the count and at her father, whose satisfaction she saw and enjoyed. Feeling that he was appreciated by the father, inspired by the charms of the daughter, and excited by the idea he had formed of her character, Count Altenberg had indeed been uncommonly agreeable, entertaining, and eloquent. During this walk, though Caroline said but little, yet that little, to a man of the count's discernment, was sufficient to show good judgment and great capacity. This increased the admiration and interest which her beauty and manners, and all he had heard of her conduct, created.

It is said to be one of the characteristics of genius, that it is able quickly to discover and elicit genius, wherever it exists. It is certain that with the celerity of intuition, of sympathy, or of practised penetration, Count Albert perceived Caroline's intellectual superiority. He had been, at first, curious to discover whether her mental qualifications were equal to her

extraordinary personal beauty; but he had soon forgotten his intention of trying her abilities, in anxiety to convince her of his own. The whole turn and style of his conversation now proved, more than any compliment could possibly have shown, the high opinion he had of her understanding, and of the elevation of her mind. A woman may always judge of the real estimation in which she is held, by the conversation which is addressed to her.

All this time, where were Rosamond, Mrs Percy, and Mr Temple? Mr Temple had taken them to see a fine view; Mr Percy proposed to sit down and quietly wait their return; Caroline and the count seemed to have no objection to oblige him, and they placed themselves under a spreading beech. They had not been seated many minutes before they were interrupted by the appearance of commissioner Falconer, who came, by a cross path, from the house.

"At last I have found you. What a prodigious walk you have taken!" cried the commissioner, wiping his forehead. "But where's Mrs Percy and the rest of your party? I have so walked to catch you—rode over on purpose to pay my compliments to the ladies before they return home—and I come chargé d'affaires from Mrs Falconer to Mrs Percy. I must see Mrs Percy—Oh! here she is, coming down the hill—ay, from the *point of view*—Mercy! how you have walked: I am not equal to the *grand tour*—it kills me. But I am so sorry I was not here time enough to do the honours of Clermont Park, as Lord Oldborough is confined. Who has Mrs Percy for her cicerone? Ha! Mr Temple—I thought he was always so busy—deputed by Lord Oldborough—really!—Hum—I hope Lord Oldborough did not conceive that there was any want of *empressement* on my part—I should have been here a full hour sooner but

that my ladies were so late at breakfast after sitting up—and I thought your ladies might have been fatigued too—but Miss Caroline Percy, I see, fresh as a rose——"

The commissioner then, as if half in jest, half in earnest, paid Caroline a profusion of compliments upon her appearance the preceding night—numbered on his fingers the conquests she had made, and the hearts she had broken. Mrs Percy, Rosamond, and Mr Temple came up; and, as soon as they had expressed their raptures on the beauty of this view, the commissioner presented his note from Mrs Falconer to Mrs Percy, to which, he said, he was most anxious to be the bearer of a favourable answer, as he knew that he should otherwise be ill-received at home, and the disappointment would be great. The note contained a pressing invitation to a play, which the young people at Falconer Court had it in contemplation to represent. Whether it was to be Zara or Cato, they had not yet positively decided—for Cato they were in terrible distress for a Marcia—could Miss Caroline Percy be prevailed upon to try Marcia? She would look the part so well, and, no doubt, act it so well. Or if she preferred Zara, Miss Georgiana Falconer would, with pleasure, take the part of the confidante. Dresses in great forwardness, Turkish or Roman, convertible in a few hours' notice—should wait Miss Percy's decision.

"Well, my dear Caroline, what say you?" cried Mrs Percy.

Caroline was going to answer.

"No, no, don't answer yet," interrupted the commissioner: "let me add, what I find Mrs Falconer took it for granted I would say, that there can be no possible difficulty or inconvenience about the goings and comings, and horses and carriages, and beds, and all those sort of things—for our horses and carriages can have nothing to do whilst the ladies are rehearsing

—shall attend you any day — any hour — and beds we can contrive: so, I beseech you, let none of these vulgar sublunary considerations deprive us of a Zara or a Marcia—But say, which shall it be?——Which character, my charming cousin, will you do us the honour and pleasure to take?"

Count Altenberg advanced a step, full of eager expectation. When he heard Caroline pronounce, with great politeness, a refusal, for the first moment he looked disappointed, but the next seemed satisfied and pleased. It would have highly gratified and interested him to have seen Caroline act either the sublime or the tender heroine, but he preferred seeing her support her own character with modest dignity.

Commissioner Falconer pleaded and pressed in vain; Caroline was steady in her refusal, though the manner of it was so gentle, that every instant he thought he should vanquish her reluctance. At length he turned from the ladies to the gentlemen for assistance.

"Mr Temple, I am sure you will join my entreaties —Count Altenberg——"

Count Altenberg "would not presume to ask a favour, which had been refused to the commissioner and to Mrs Falconer." Caroline understood, and gave him credit for his politeness.

"Then, if I must give up this point," said the commissioner, "at least do not let me return disappointed in every respect—let me hope that you will all favour us with your company at our play."

This invitation was accepted with many thanks.

"And, remember, you must not run away from us that night," added the commissioner. "Mrs Falconer will have reason to be jealous of Clermont Park, if she finds that it draws our friends and relations away from Falconer Court."

The carriage, which had been ordered to the great

gate of the park, was now waiting there, and the commissioner took leave of his relations, with many shakes of the hand and many expressions of regret. Count Altenberg continued talking to Caroline till the last moment; and after he had handed her into the carriage, as he took leave of Mr Percy, he said that he had to thank him and his family for some of the most agreeable among the many agreeable hours he had passed since he came to England.

On their way home, this happy family party eagerly talked over everything and everybody that had interested them—first and chiefly they spoke of Count Altenburg. Caroline said how often, during their walk, she had regretted her mother's and sister's absence. She recollected and reminded her father of some of the striking circumstances they had heard, and Mr Percy and she repeated so many curious and interesting anecdotes, so many just observations and noble sentiments, that Mrs Percy and Rosamond were quite charmed with the count. Rosamond, however, was surprised by the openness and ease with which Caroline praised and talked of this gentleman.

"I will say nothing," thought she; "for I am determined to be prudent this time. But certainly here is no danger that her love should unsought be won. Only this I may and must think, that Caroline cannot, without affectation, avoid seeing that she has made a conquest."

Mistaken again, Rosamond—Caroline had neither seen nor suspected it. Count Altenberg's gratitude for the hospitality shown to his countrymen at the time of the shipwreck, his recent acquaintance with her brother Alfred, and all he had heard of her father from the grateful tenants at Percy Hall, accounted, as Caroline justly thought, for the eagerness he had shown to be introduced to her family. His conversing so much

with her, she thought, was natural, as he was a stranger to most of the company, and had some subjects of conversation in common with her and her family. Caroline was not apt to imagine admiration in every word or look ; she was not expert in construing every compliment into a declaration or an innuendo of love.

His conversation, during their walk, had been perfectly free from all compliment. It had been on subjects so interesting, that she had been carried on without having had time to think of love. A good and great character had opened to her view, and she had been so absorbed in sympathy, that though she had thought of nothing but Count Altenberg, she had never thought of him with any reference to herself.

The morning after their return home Count Altenberg came to the Hills, accompanied by Mr Temple. They staid till it was late ; for the count seemed to forget the hour of the day, till reminded of it by Mr Temple. Caroline, in her own family, at her home, pleased Count Altenberg particularly. The interest he felt about her increased, and he afterwards took or made frequent opportunities of calling at the Hills ; his conversation was generally addressed to Mr Percy, but he observed Caroline with peculiar attention—and Rosamond was confirmed in her opinion. A few weeks passed in this manner, while the play was preparing at Falconer Court. But before we go to the play, let us take a peep behind the scenes, and inquire what is and has been doing by the Falconer family. Even they who are used to the ennui subsequent to dissipation, even they who have experienced the vicissitudes of coquetry, the mortifications of rivalship, and the despair of disappointed vanity, can scarcely conceive the complication of disagreeable ideas and emotions with which Miss Georgiana Falconer awoke the morning after the magnificent ball.

The image of her beautiful rival disturbed her morning dreams, and stood before her fancy the moment she opened her eyes. Wakening, she endeavoured to recollect and compare all that had passed the preceding night; but there had been such tumult in her mind, that she had only a vague remembrance of the transactions: she had a confused idea that the count was in love, and that he was not in love with her: she had fears that, during the heat of competition, she had betrayed unbecoming emotion; but gradually habitual vanity predominated; her hopes brightened; she began to fancy that the impression made by her rival might be easily effaced, and that they should see no more of the fair phantom. That branch of the Percy family, she recollected, were to be considered only as decayed gentry; and she flattered herself that they would necessarily and immediately sink again into that obscurity from which her mother's ill-fated civility had raised them. Her mother, she knew, had invited these Percys against her will, and would be particularly careful on account of Sir Robert Percy (and Arabella) not to show them any farther attention. Thus things would, in a day or two, fall again into their proper train. "No doubt the count will call this morning, to know how we do after the ball."

So she rose, and resolved to dress herself with the most becoming negligence.

Very different was the result of her experienced mother's reflections. Mrs Falconer saw that her daughter's chance of the count was now scarcely worth considering; that it must be given up at once, to avoid the danger of utter ruin to other speculations of a more promising kind. The mother knew the unmanageable violence of her daughter's temper: she had seen her Georgiana expose herself the preceding night at the ball to her particular friends, and Mrs Falconer knew

enough of the world to dread reports originating from particular friends; she dreaded, also, that on some future similar occasion, the young lady's want of command over her jealousy should produce some terribly ridiculous scene, confirm the report that she had an unhappy passion for Count Altenberg, stigmatize her as a forlorn maiden, and ruin her chance of any other establishment. In this instance she had been misled by her own and her daughter's vanity. It was mortifying, to be sure, to find that she had been wrong; and still more provoking to be obliged to acknowledge that Mr Falconer was right; but in the existing circumstances it was absolutely necessary, and Mrs Falconer, with a species of satisfaction, returned to her former habits of thinking, and resumed certain old schemes, from which the arrival of the count had diverted her imagination. She expected the two Mr Clays at Falconer Court the next day. Either of them, she thought, might be a good match for Georgiana. To be sure, it was said that French Clay had gaming debts to a large amount upon his hands—this was against him; but, in his favour, there was the chance of his elder brother's dying unmarried, and leaving him Clay Hall. Or, take it the other way, and suppose English Clay to be made the object—he was one of the men who professedly have a horror of being taken in to marry; yet no men are more likely "to run into the danger to avoid the apprehension." Suppose the worst, and that neither of the Clays could be worked to any good purpose, Mrs Falconer had still in reserve that *pis aller* Petcalf, whose father, the good general, was at Bath, with the gout in his stomach; and if he should die, young Petcalf would pop into possession of the general's lodge in *Asia Minor:* * not so fine a place, to be sure, nor an establishment so well appointed as Clay Hall; but still with a

* A district in England so called.

nabob's fortune a great deal might be done — and Georgiana might make Petcalf throw down the lodge and build. So at the worst she might settle very comfortably with young Petcalf, whom she could manage as she pleased, provided she never let him see her *penchant* for Count Altenberg. Mrs Falconer determined to turn the tables dexterously, and to make it appear that the count admired Georgiana, but saw she could not be induced to leave England. "We must," said she to herself, "persuade English Clay that I would not for any consideration give my daughter to a foreigner."

In consequence of these plans and reflections, Mrs Falconer began her new system of operations, by writing that note full of superfluous civility to Mrs Percy, with which commissioner Falconer had been charged: the pressing Caroline to play Zara or Marcia, the leaving to her the choice of dresses and characters, the assurance that Miss Georgiana Falconer would take the confidante's part with pleasure, were all strokes of Mrs Falconer's policy. By these means she thought she could most effectually do away all suspicion of her own or her daughter's jealousy of Miss Caroline Percy. Mrs Falconer foresaw that, in all probability, Caroline would decline acting; but if she had accepted, Mrs Falconer would have been sincerely pleased, confident, as she was, that Caroline's inferiority to her Georgiana, who was an accomplished actress, would be conspicuously manifest.

As soon as Mrs Percy's answer, and Caroline's refusal arrived, Mrs Falconer went to her daughter Georgiana's apartment, who was giving directions to her maid, Lydia Sharpe, about some part of Zara's dress.

"My dear," said Mrs Falconer, looking carelessly at the dress, "you won't want a very expensive dress for Zara."

"Indeed, ma'am, I shall," cried Georgiana: "Zara will be nothing, unless she is well dressed."

"Well, my dear, you must manage as well as you can with Lydia Sharpe. Your last court-dress surely she can make do vastly well, with a little alteration to give it a Turkish air."

"Oh! dear me, ma'am—a little alteration!" cried Lydia: "no alteration upon the face of Heaven's earth, that I could devise from this till Christmas, would give it a Turkish air. You don't consider, nor conceive, ma'am, how *skimping* these here court-trains are now—for say the length might answer, it's length without any manner of breadth, you know, ma'am—look, ma'am, a mere strip!—only two breadths of three-quarters bare each—which gives no folds in nature, nor drapery, nor majesty, which, for a Turkish queen, is indispensably requisite, I presume."

"Another breadth or two would make it full enough, and cotton velvet will do, and come cheap," said Mrs Falconer.

"Cotton velvet!" cried Miss Georgiana. "I would not wear cotton velvet—like the odious, shabby Miss Chattertons, who are infamous for it."

"But on the stage, what eye could detect it, child?" said Mrs Falconer.

"Eye, ma'am! no, to be sure, at that distance: but the first touch to anybody that understands velvets would betray it—and them that is on the stage along with Miss Georgiana, or behind the scenes, will detect it. And I understood the ladies was to sup in their dresses, and on such an occasion I presumed you would like Miss Georgiana to have an entire *cap à pie* new dress, as the Lady Arlingtons and everybody has seen her appear in this, and has it by heart, I may say—and the count too, who, of course, will

expect to see Zara spick and span——But I leave it all to your own better judgment, ma'am—I am only just mentioning——"

"All I know is, that the play will be nothing unless it is well dressed," cried Miss Georgiana; "and I never will play Zara in old trumpery."

"Well, my dear, there's your amber satin, or your pink, or your green, or your white, or—I am sure you have dresses enough. Lydia, produce them, and let me see."

Lydia covered the bed with various finery; but to every dress that was produced some insuperable objection was started by the young lady or by her maid.

"I remember you had a lavender satin, that I do not see here, Georgiana," said Mrs Falconer.

"The colour did not become me, ma'am, and I sold it to Lydia."

Sold! gave, perhaps some innocent reader may suspect that the young lady meant to say.—No: this buying and selling of finery now goes on frequently between a certain class of fashionable maids and mistresses; and some young ladies are now not ashamed to become old clothes-women.

"Vastly well," said Mrs Falconer, smiling; "you have your own ways and means, and I am glad of it, for I can tell you there is no chance of my getting you any money from your father; I dare not speak to him on that subject—for he was extremely displeased with me about Mrs Sparkes' last bill: so if you want a new dress for Zara, you and Lydia Sharpe must settle it as well you can between you. I will, in the meantime, go and write a note, while you make your bargain."

"Bargain! me, ma'am!" cried Lydia Sharpe, as Mrs Falconer left the room; "I am the worst creature

extant at bargaining, especially with ladies. But anything I can do certainly, to accommodate, I shall, I'm sure, be happy."

"Well, then," said Miss Georgiana, "if you take this white satin off my hands, Lydia, I am sure I shall be happy."

"I have no objection, ma'am—that is, I'm in duty bound to make no manner of objections," said Lydia, with a very sentimental air, hanging her head aside, and with one finger rubbing her under-lip slowly, as she contemplated the white satin, which her young mistress held up for sale. "I am really scrupulous—but you're sensible, Miss Georgiana, that your white satin is all so frayed with the crape sleeves. Lady Trant recommended——"

"Only a very little frayed."

"But in the front breadth, ma'am; you know that makes a world of difference, because there's no hiding, and with satin no turning—and not a bit neither to new body."

"The body is perfectly good."

"I beg pardon for observing, but you know, ma'am, you noticed yourself how it was blacked and soiled by wearing under your black lace last time, and that you could not wear it again on that account."

"I!—but *you*——"

"To be sure, ma'am, there's a great deal of difference between I and you: only when one comes to bargaining——"

She paused, seeing wrath gathering black and dire in her young lady's countenance; before it burst, she changed her tone, and continued, "All I mean to say, ma'am, is, that white satin being a style of thing I could not pretend to think of wearing in any shape myself, I could only take it to part with again, and in the existing circumstances, I'm confident I should

lose by it. But rather than disoblige, I'll take it at whatever you please."

"Nay, I don't please about the matter, Lydia; but I am sure you had an excellent bargain of my lavender satin, which I had only worn but twice."

"Dear heart!—La, ma'am! if you knew what trouble I had with Mrs Sparkes, the dressmaker, about it, because of the coffee-stain—And I vow to my stars I am ashamed to mention it; but Mrs Scrags, Lady Trant's woman, and both the Lady Arlingtons' maids, can vouch for the truth of it. I did not make a penny, but lost, ma'am, last year, by you and Miss Bell; that is, not by you nor Miss Bell, but by all I bought, and sold to disadvantage; which, I am morally certain, you would not have permitted, had you known of it, as I told Mrs Scrags, who was wondering and pitying of me: my young ladies, Mrs Scrags, says I——"

"No matter," interrupted Georgiana; "no matter what you said to Mrs Scrags, or Mrs Scrags to you—but tell me, at once, Lydia, what you can afford to give me for these three gowns."

"I afford to give!" said Lydia Sharpe. "Well, the times is past, to be sure, and greatly changed, since ladies used to give, but now it's their maids must give—then, suppose—let's see, ma'am—for the three, the old white satin, and the amber satin, and the black lace—why, ma'am, if you'd throw me the pink crape into the bargain, I don't doubt but I could afford to give you nine guineas, ma'am," said the maid.

"Then, Lydia Sharpe, you will never have them, I promise you," cried the mistress: "Nine guineas! how can you have the assurance to offer me such a sum? As if I had never bought a gown in my life, and did not know the value or price of anything! Do you take me for a fool?"

"Oh! dear no, miss—I'm confident that you know

the value and price to the uttermost penny—but only you forget that there's a difference betwixt the buying and selling price for ladies; but if you please, ma'am —I would do anything to oblige and accommodate you—I will consult the Lady Arlingtons' women, Miss Flora and Miss Pritchard, who is judges in this line—most honourable appraisers; and if they 'praise the articles, on inspection, a shilling higher, I am sure I shall submit to their jurisdiction—if they say ten guineas, ma'am, you shall have it, for I love to be at a word and a blow—and to do everything genteel: so I'll step and consult my friends, ma'am, and give you my ultimatum in half-an-hour."

So saying, whilst her young mistress stood flushed and swelling with pride and anger, which, however, the sense of her own convenience and interest controlled, the maid swept up the many coloured robes in her arms, and carried them up the back stairs, to hold her consultation with her friends, the most honourable of appraisers.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs Falconer, returning as she heard the maid quit the room, "have you driven your bargain for the loan? Have you raised the supplies?"

"No, indeed, ma'am—for Lydia is grown a perfect Jew. She may well say she is related to Sharpe, the attorney—she is the keenest, most interested creature in the world—and grown very saucy too."

"Like all those people, my dear; but one can't do without them."

"But one can change them."

"But, to use their own language, one is not sure of bettering oneself—and then their wages are to be paid—and all one's little family secrets are at their mercy."

"It's very provoking—it is very provoking!" re-

peated Miss Georgiana, walking up and down the room. "Such an extortioner!—for my amber satin, and my white satin, and my black lace, and my pink crape, only nine guineas! What do you think of that, ma'am?"

"I think, my dear, you pay a prodigious premium for ready money; but nine guineas will dress Zara decently, I dare say, if that's your object."

"Nine guineas! ma'am," cried Miss Georgiana, "impossible! I can't act at all—so there's an end of the matter."

"Not an end of the matter quite," said Mrs Falconer coolly; "for in that case I must look out for another Zara."

"And where will you find one, ma'am?"

"The Lady Arlingtons have both fine figures—and, I dare say, would either of them oblige me."

"Not they. Lady Anne, with her indolence and her languor—a lady who looks as if she was saying, 'Quasha, tell Quaco to tell Fibba to pick up this pin that lies at my foot;' do you think she'd get a part by heart, ma'am, to oblige you—or that she could, if she would, act Zara—No more than she could fly!"

"But her sister, Lady Frances, would and could," said Mrs Falconer. "She is quick enough, and I know she longs to try Zara."

"Longs!—Lord, ma'am, she longs for fifty things in a minute!—Quick!—Yes, but don't depend on her, I advise you; for she does not know, for two seconds together, what she would have or what she would do."

"Then I have resource in one who, I am persuaded, will not disappoint me or anybody else," said Mrs Falconer.

"Who can you mean, ma'am?"

"Miss Caroline Percy. Count Altenberg put it

into my head: he observed that she would look the character remarkably well—and I will write to her directly."

Without power of articulating, Miss Georgiana Falconer fixed her eyes upon her mother for some moments.

"You think I have lost my senses this morning—I thought, and I am afraid so did many other people, that you had lost yours last night. Another such scene, your friends the Lady Arlingtons for spectators, you are ridiculous, and, of course, undone for life in the fashionable world—establishment, and everything else that is desirable, irrevocably out of the question. I am surprised that a girl of your understanding and really polished manners, Georgiana, should, the moment anything crosses or vexes you, show no more command of temper, grace, or dignity, than the veriest country girl. When things go wrong, do you see me lose all presence of mind; or rather do you ever see me change a muscle of my countenance?"

"The muscles of some people's countenance, ma'am, I suppose, are differently made from others—mine will change with my feelings, and there is no remedy, for my feelings unfortunately are uncommonly acute."

"That is a misfortune, indeed, Georgiana; but not without remedy, I trust. If you will take my advice——"

"Were you ever in love, ma'am?"

"Properly—when everything was settled for my marriage; but not improperly, or it might never have come to my wedding-day. Headstrong child! listen to me, or you will never see that day with Count Altenberg."

"Do you mean, ma'am, to ask Miss Caroline Percy to play Zara?"

"I will answer no questions, Georgiana, till you have heard me patiently."

"I only hope, ma'am, you'll put it in the play-bill —or, if you don't, I will—Zara, Miss Caroline Percy —by particular desire of Count Altenberg."

"Whatever I do, you may hope and be assured, Georgiana, shall be properly done," cried Mrs Falconer, rising with dignity; "and, since you are not disposed to listen to me, I shall leave you to your own inventions, and go and write my notes."

"La, mamma! dear mamma! *dear'st* mamma!" cried the young lady, throwing her arms round her mother, and stopping her. "You that never change a muscle of your countenance, how hasty you are with your own Georgiana!—sit down, and I'll listen patiently!"

Mrs Falconer seated herself, and Miss Georgiana prepared to listen patiently, armed with a piece of gold fringe, which she rolled and unrolled, and held in different lights and varied festoons whilst her mother spoke, or, as the young lady would say, lectured. Mrs Falconer was too well aware of the impracticableness of her daughter's temper to tell her upon this occasion the whole truth, even if her own habits would have permitted her to be sincere. She never mentioned to Georgiana that she had totally given up the scheme of marrying her to Count Altenberg, and that she was thoroughly convinced there was no chance of her winning him; but, on the contrary, she represented to the young lady that the count had only a transient fancy for Miss Caroline Percy, which would never come to any serious proposal, unless it was opposed; that in a short time they should go to town, and the count, of course, would return with Lord Oldborough: then the game would be in her own hands, provided, in the meantime, Georgiana should conduct herself with prudence and temper, and let no creature see or suspect any sort of anxiety; for that would give such

an advantage against her, and such a triumph to Caroline and her friends, who, as Mrs Falconer said, were, no doubt, all on the watch to "interpret," or misinterpret, "motions, looks, and eyes." "My dear," concluded the mother, "your play is to show yourself always easy and happy, whatever occurs; occupied with other things, surrounded by other admirers, and encouraging them properly—properly of course to pique the jealousy of your count."

"My count!" said Georgiana, with half a smile; "but Miss——You say this fancy of his will pass away—but when? When?"

"You young people always say, '*but when?*' you have no idea of looking forward: a few months, a year, more or less, what does it signify? Georgiana, are you in such imminent danger of growing old or ugly?"

Georgiana turned her eyes involuntarily towards the glass, and smiled.

"But, ma'am, you were not in earnest then about getting another Zara?"

"The offer I made—the compliments I paid in the note I wrote this morning, were all necessary to cover your mistakes of the night."

"Made! Wrote!" cried the young lady, with terror in her voice and eyes: "Good heavens! mother, what have you done?"

"I had no doubt at the time I wrote," continued Mrs Falconer coolly, "I had no other idea, but that Miss Caroline Percy would decline."

"Oh! ma'am," cried Georgiana, half crying, then stamping with passion, "oh! ma'am, how could you imagine, or affect to imagine, that that girl, that odious girl, who was born to be my plague, with all her affected humility, would decline?—Decline!—no, she will be transported to come sweeping in, in gorgeous

tragedy—Zara! Marcia! If the whole family can beg or borrow a dress for her, we are undone—that's our only chance. Oh! mother, what possessed you to do this?"

"Gently, pretty Passionate, and trust to my judgment in future," putting into her daughter's hands Mrs Percy's note.

"Miss Caroline Percy—sorry—out of her power! ——Oh! charming!—a fine escape!" cried Georgiana, delighted. "You may be sure it was for want of the dress, though, mamma."

"No matter—but about yours, my dear?"

"Oh! yes, ma'am—my dress; that's the only difficulty now."

"I certainly wish you, my darling, to appear well, especially as all the world will be here: the two Clays—by-the-bye, here's their letter—they come to-morrow—and in short the whole world; but, as to money, there's but one way of putting your father into good-humour enough with you to touch upon that string."

"One way—well, if there be one way—any way."

"Petcalf!"

"Oh! Petcalf is my abhorrence——"

"There is the thing! He was speaking to your father seriously about you, and your father sounded me: I said you would never agree, and he was quite displeased—that and Mrs Sparkes' bill completely overset him. Now, if you had your wish, Georgiana—what would be your taste, child?"

"My wish! My taste!—Oh! that would be for a delicate, delicate, soft, sentimental blue satin, with silver fringe, looped with pearl, for my first act; and in my last——"

"Two dresses! Oh! you extravagant! out of all possibility."

"I am only wishing, telling you my taste, dear mamma. You know there must be a change of dress, in the last act, for Zara's nuptials—now for my wedding dress, mamma, my taste would be

'Shine out, appear, be found, my lovely Zara,'

in bridal white and silver. You know, ma'am, I am only supposing."

"Well then, supposition for supposition," replied Mrs Falconer: "supposing I let your father hope that you are not *so* decided to abhor poor Petcalf——"

"Oh! dear mamma, I am so persecuted about that Petcalf! and compared with Count Altenberg, my father must be blind, or think me an idiot."

"Oh! between him and the count there is no comparison, to be sure; but I forgot to mention, that what your father builds upon is our poor old friend the general's death—Clay here in a postscript, you see, mentions the gout in his stomach—so I am afraid he is as good as gone, as your father says, and then *the Lodge* in *Asia Minor* is certainly a pretty place to sit down upon, if one could do no better."

"But, ma'am, the count's vast possessions and rank!"

"I grant you all that, my dear; but our present object is the play—Zara's royal robes cannot be had for nothing, you know—you never listened to my infallible means of obtaining your wish: I think I can engage that the commissioner will not refuse us, if you will empower me to say to him, that by this time twelvemonth, if nothing better offers—mind my *if*—Petcalf shall be rewarded for his constancy."

"If—Oh! dear me! But before this time twelvemonth the count——"

"Or one of the Clays might offer, and in that case, my *if* brings you off safe with your father."

"Well, then, mamma, upon condition that you will promise me, upon your word, you will lay a marked emphasis upon your *if*—I believe, for Zara's sake, I must——"

"I knew you would behave at last like a sensible girl," said Mrs Falconer: "I'll go and speak to your father directly."

Mrs Falconer thus fairly gained her point, by setting Georgiana's passion for dress against her passion for Count Altenberg; and having, moreover, under false pretences, extorted from the young lady many promises to keep her temper prudently, and to be upon the best terms possible with her rival, the mother went away perfectly satisfied with her own address.

The father was brought to perform his part, not without difficulty—Carte blanche for Zara's sentimental blue and bridal white robes was obtained, silver fringe and pearls inclusive: the triumphant Zara rang for the base confidante of her late distresses—Lydia Sharpe re-entered, with the four dresses upon sale; but she and her guineas, and the most honourable appraisers, all were treated with becoming scorn—and as Lydia obeyed her young lady's orders to replace her clothes in her wardrobe, and never to think of them more, they suddenly rose in value in her estimation, and she repented that she had been quite so much of an extortioner. She knew the difference of her mistress's tone when disappointed or successful, and guessed that supplies had been obtained by some means or other: "New dresses, I smell, are the order of the day," said Lydia Sharpe to herself; "but I'll engage she will want me presently to make them up: so I warrant I won't come down off my high horse till I see why——Miss Georgiana Falconer, ma'am, I beg pardon—you are the mistress—I meant only to oblige and accommodate when called upon—

but if I'm not wanted, I'm not wanted—and I hope ladies will find them that will be more abler and willinger to serve them."

So saying, half flouncing, half pouting, she retired. Her young mistress, aware that Lydia's talents and expeditious performance, as a mantua-maker and a milliner, were essential to the appearance of Zara, suppressed her own resentment, submitted to her maid's insolence, and brought her into humour again that night, by a present of the famous white satin.

In due time, consequently, the Turkish dresses were in great forwardness. Lest we should never get to the play, we forbear to relate all the various frettings, jealousies, clashing vanities, and petty quarrels, which occurred between the actresses and their friends, during the getting up of this piece and its rehearsals. We need mention only that the seeds of irreconcileable dislike were sown at this time between the Miss Falconers and their dear friends, the Lady Arlingtons: there was some difficulty made by Lady Anne about lending her diamond crescent for Zara's turban—Miss Georgiana could never forgive this; and Lady Frances, on her part, was provoked, beyond measure, by an order from the duke, her uncle, forbidding her to appear on the stage. She had some reason to suspect that this order came in consequence of a treacherous hint in a letter of Georgiana's to Lady Trant, which went round, through Lady Jane Granville, to the duke, who, otherwise, as Lady Frances observed, "in the midst of his politics, might never have heard a word of the matter."

Mrs Falconer had need of all her power over the muscles of her face, and all her address, in these delicate and difficult circumstances. Her daughter Arabella, too, was sullen—the young lady was subject to her brother John's fits of obstinacy. For some

time she could not be brought to undertake the part of Selima, and no other Selima was to be had. She did not see why she should condescend to play the confidante for Georgiana's Zara—why she was to be sacrificed to her sister; and Sir Robert Percy, her admirer, not even to be invited, because the other Percys were to come.

Mrs Falconer plied her well with flattery, through Colonel Spandrill; and at last Arabella was pacified by a promise that the following week "Love in a Village," or "The Lord of the Manor," should be acted, in which she should choose her part, and in which her voice and musical talents would be brought forward—and Sir Robert Percy and his friends should be the principal auditors.

Recovered, or partly recovered from her fit of the sullens, she was prevailed upon to say she would try what she could do in Selima.

The parts were learnt by heart; the dresses, after innumerable alterations, finished to the satisfaction of the heroes and heroines of the drama.

Their quarrels, and the quarrels of their friends and of their servants, male and female, were at last hushed to temporary repose, and—the great, the important day arrived.

The preceding evening, Mrs Falconer, as she sat quite exhausted in the green-room, was heard to declare, she was so tired, that she would not go through the same thing again, for one month, to be Queen of England.

Chapter xviii.

THE theatre at Falconer Court was not very spacious, but it was elegantly fitted up, extremely well lighted, and had a good effect. There was a brilliant audience, an excellent band of music, and the whole had a gay and festive appearance.

The Percy family, as they came from a great distance, were late. The house was crowded. Mrs Falconer was obliged to seat Mrs Percy and her daughters with the Lady Arlingtons on a bench upon the stage; a conspicuous situation, which had been reserved for their ladyships.

Every eye instantly turned upon the beautiful Caroline. She bore the gaze of public admiration with a blushing dignity, which interested everybody in her favour. Count Altenberg, who had anxiously expected the moment of her arrival, was, however, upon his guard. Knowing that he was watched by Mrs Falconer's friends, he was determined that his secret thoughts should not be seen. One involuntary glance he gave, but immediately withdrew his eye, and continued his conversation with the gentleman next to him. After a few moments had elapsed, he could indulge himself in looking at Caroline unobserved, for the gaze of public admiration is as transient as it is eager. It is surprising how short a time any face, however beautiful, engages numbers who meet together to be seen.

The audience were now happily full of themselves, arranging their seats, and doing civilities to those of their friends who were worthy of notice.

"Lady Trant! won't your ladyship sit in the front row?"

"I'm vastly well, thank you."

"Lady Kew, I am afraid you won't see over my head."

"Oh! I assure you—perfectly—perfectly."

"Colonel Spandrill, I'll trouble you—my shawl."

"Clay, lend me your opera-glass.——How did you leave all at Bath?"

"I'm so glad that General Petcalf's gout in his stomach did not carry him off—for young Petcalf could not have acted, you know, to-night.——Mrs Harcourt is trying to catch your eye, Lady Kew."

All those who were new to the theatre at Falconer Court, or who were not intimate with the family, were in great anxiety to inform themselves on one important point, before the prologue should begin. Stretching to those who were, or had the reputation of being, good authorities, they asked in whispers, "Do you know if there is to be any clapping of hands?—Can you tell me whether it is allowable to say anything?"

It seems that at some private theatres loud demonstrations of applause were forbidden. It was thought more genteel to approve and admire in silence—thus to draw the line between professional actors and actresses, and gentlemen and lady performers. Upon trial, however, in some instances, it had been found that the difference was sufficiently obvious, without marking it by any invidious distinction. Young and old amateurs have acknowledged, that the silence, however genteel, was so dreadfully awful, that they preferred even the noise of vulgar acclamations.

The cup of flattery was found so sweet, that objections were no longer made to swallowing it in public.

The overture finished, the prologue, which was written by Mr Seebright, was received with merited applause. And, after a buzz of requests and promises for copies, the house was silent—the curtain drew up, and the first appearance of Zara, in the

delicate sentimental blue satin, was hailed with plaudits, long and loud — plaudits which were reiterated at the end of her first speech, which was, indeed, extremely well recited. Count Altenberg leaned forward, and seemed to listen with delight; then stood up, and several times renewed his plaudits; at first, with an appearance of timidity, afterwards with decision and energy. Miss Georgiana Falconer really acted uncommonly well, so that he could, without flattery, applaud; and if he did exaggerate a little in the expression of his admiration, he deemed it allowable. He had another object: he was absolutely determined to see whether or not Caroline was capable of the mean passions which had disgusted him in her rival. He reflected that he had seen her only when she was triumphant; and he was anxious to know how she would appear in different circumstances. Of her high intellectual endowments he could not doubt; but temper is not always a blessing given to the fair, or even to the wise. It may seem strange that a gallant man should think of a beauty's temper; and, probably, if Count Altenberg had considered Caroline only as a beauty, he would not have troubled himself to make, on this point, any severe and dangerous scrutiny.

The play went on—Zara sustaining the interest of the scene. She was but feebly supported by the sulky Selima, and the other parts were but ill performed. The faults common to unpractised actors occurred: one of Osman's arms never moved, and the other sawed the air perpetually, as if in pure despite of Hamlet's prohibition. Then, in crossing over, Osman was continually entangled in Zara's robe; or, when standing still, she was obliged to twitch her train thrice before she could get it from beneath his leaden feet. When confident that he could repeat a

speech fluently, he was apt to turn his back upon his mistress; or, when he felt himself called upon to listen to his mistress, he would regularly turn his back upon the audience. But all these are defects permitted by the licence of a private theatre, allowable by courtesy to gentlemen-actors; and things went on as well as could be expected. Osman had not his part by heart, but still Zara covered all deficiencies: and Osman did no worse than other Osmans had done before him, till he came to the long speech, beginning with—

> "The sultans, my great ancestors, bequeath'd
> Their empire to me, but their tastes they gave not."

Powerful prompting got him through the first six lines decently enough, till he came to

> ——"wasting tenderness in wild profusion,
> I might look down to my surrounded feet,
> And bless contending beauties."

At this he bungled sadly—his hearing suddenly failing as well as his memory, there was a dead stop. In vain the prompter, the scene-shifter, the candle-snuffer, as loud as they could, and much louder than they ought, reiterated the next sentence—

> "I might speak,
> Serenely slothful."

It was plain that Osman could not speak, nor was he "serene." He had begun, as in dangers great he was wont, to kick his left ankle-bone rapidly with his right heel; and through the pomp of Osman's oriental robes and turban young Petcalf stood confessed. He threw back an angry look at the prompter—Zara, terrified, gave up all for lost—the two Lady Arlingtons retreated behind the scenes to laugh—the polite audience struggled not to smile. Count Altenberg at

this moment looked at Caroline, who, instead of joining in the laugh, showed by her countenance and manner the most good-natured sympathy.

Zara, recovering her presence of mind, swept across the stage in such a manner as to hide from view her kicking sultan; and as she passed, she whispered the line to him so distinctly, that he caught the sound, left off kicking, went on with his speech, and all was well again. Count Altenberg forgot to join in the cheering plaudits, he was so much charmed at that instant by Caroline's smile.

Fortunately for Zara, and for the audience, in the next scenes the part of Lusignan was performed by a gentleman who had been well used to acting—though he was not a man of any extraordinary capacity, yet, from his *habit of the boards*, and his being perfect in his part, he now seemed quite a superior person. It was found unaccountably easier to act with this son of labour than with any other of the gentlemen-performers, though they were all natural geniuses.

The moment Zara appeared with Lusignan, her powers shone forth—nothing spoiled the illusion, the attention of the audience was fixed, their interest was sustained, their feelings touched. The exercise of the fan ceased in the front rows, glasses of lemonade were held untasted, and nobody consulted the play-bill. Excited by success, sympathy, and applause the most flattering, Zara went on with increasing éclat.

Meanwhile the Percy family, who were quite intent upon the play, began to find their situation disagreeable from some noise behind the scenes. A party of ladies, among whom was Lady Frances Arlington, stood whispering so loud close to Caroline that their voices were heard by her more distinctly than those of the actors. Lady Frances stood half hid between the side scenes, holding a little white dog in her arms.

"Hush!" cried her ladyship, putting her fingers on her lips—her companions became silent instantly. The house was now in profound attention. Zara was in the midst of her favourite speech—

> "Would you learn more, and open all my heart?
> Know then that, spite of this renew'd injustice,
> I do not—cannot—wish to love you less;
> —That long before you look'd so low as Zara,
> She gave her heart to Osman."

At the name of *Osman*, the dog started and struggled —Lady Frances appeared to restrain him, but he ran on the stage—leaped up on Zara—and at the repetition of the name of *Osman* sat down on his hind-legs, begged with his fore-paws, and began to whine in such a piteous manner that the whole audience were on the brink of laughter—Zara, and all her attendants and friends, lost their presence of mind.

Caroline sprang forward quite across the stage, caught the dog in her arms, and carried him off. Count Altenberg, no longer master of himself, clapped his hands, and the whole house resounded with applause.

Miss Georgiana Falconer misunderstood the cause of the plaudits, imagined that she was *encored*, cast down her eyes, and, as soon as there was silence, advanced and recommenced her speech, of which Count Altenberg did not hear one word.

This malicious trick had been contrived by Lady Frances Arlington, to revenge herself on Miss Georgiana Falconer for having prevented her from taking a part in the play. Her ladyship had, in the course of the rehearsals, privately drilled her dog to answer to the name of Osman, when that name was pronounced in Zara's tragic tone. The dog had been kept out of the way till Zara was in the midst of that speech in which she calls repeatedly on the name

of Osman. This trick had been so well contrived, that all but those who were in the secret imagined that the appearance of the dog at this unlucky moment had been accidental. The truth began indeed to be soon whispered in confidence.

But to return to Count Altenberg. At the commencement of the play, when the idea of trying Caroline's temper had occurred to him, he had felt some anxiety lest all the high expectations he had formed, all the bright enchantment, should vanish. In the first act, he had begun by joining timidly in the general applause of Zara, dreading lest Caroline should not be blessed with that temper which could bear the praises of a rival "with unwounded ear." But the count applauded with more confidence in the second act; during the third was quite at his ease; and in the fifth could not forgive himself for having supposed it possible that Caroline could be liable to any of the foibles of her sex.

In the meantime Miss Georgiana Falconer, in high spirits, intoxicated with vanity, was persuaded that the count had returned to his senses; and so little did she know of his character, or of the human heart, as to expect that a declaration of love would soon follow this public profession of admiration. Such was the confusion of her ideas, that she was confident Zara was on the point of becoming Countess of Altenberg.

After the play was over, and a thousand compliments had been paid and received, most of the company called for their carriages. The house emptied fast: there remained only a select party, who were to stay supper. They soon adjourned to the green-room to repeat their tribute of applause to the actors. High in the midst stood Miss Georgiana Falconer, receiving incense from a crowd of adorers. As Count

Altenberg approached, she assumed a languishing air of softness and sensibility. The count said all that could reasonably be expected, but his compliments did not seem quite to satisfy the lady. She was in hopes that he was going to say something more to her taste, when French Clay pressed forward, which he did with an air neither French nor English. He protested that he could not have conceived it possible for the powers of any actress upon earth to interest him for the English Zara; "but you, madam," said he, "have done the impossible; and now I should die content, if I could see your genius do justice to Zaïre. How you would shine in the divine original when you could do such wonders for a miserable translation!"

Several gentlemen, and among others Mr Percy, would not allow that the English translation deserved to be called miserable. "The wrong side of the tapestry we cannot expect should be quite equal to the right side," said he: "Voltaire pointed out a few odd ends here and there, which disfigured the work, and required to be cut off; but upon the whole, if I recollect, he was satisfied with the piece, and complimented Mr Hill upon having preserved the general design, spirit, and simplicity of the original."

"Mere politeness in M. de Voltaire!" replied French Clay; "but, in effect, Zaïre is absolutely incapable of anything more than being *done into* English. For example, will anybody have the goodness to tell me," said he, looking round, and fixing his look of appeal on Miss Caroline Percy, "how would you translate the famous '*Zaïre!* — *vous pleurez*'?"

"Is not it translated," said Caroline, "by 'Zara! you weep?'"

"Ah! *pardonnez moi!*" cried French Clay, with

a shrug meant to be French, but which English shoulders could not cleverly execute—"*Ah! pardonnez!* to my ears now that says nothing."

"To our feelings it said a great deal just now," said Caroline, looking at Zara in a manner which was lost upon her feelings, but not upon Count Altenberg's.

"Ah! indubitably I admit," cried Mr Clay, "*la beauté est toujours dans son pays*, and tears fortunately need no translation; but when we come to words, you will allow me, ma'am, that the language of fine feeling is absolutely untranslateable, *untransfusible*."

Caroline seemed to wish to avoid being drawn forward to farther discussion, but Mr Clay repeated, in a tone of soft condescension, "Your silence flatters me with the hope, ma'am, that we agree?"

Caroline could not submit to this interpretation of her silence, and blushing, but without being disconcerted, she answered, that she had always heard, and believed, it was the test of true feeling, as of true wit, that it can be easily understood, and that its language is universal.

"If I had ever doubted that truth," said Count Altenberg, "I should have been convinced of it by what I have seen and heard this night."

Miss Georgiana Falconer bowed her head graciously to the count, and smiled, and sighed. Lady Frances Arlington and Rosamond smiled at the same moment, for they perceived by the universal language of the eye, that what Count Altenberg said was not intended for the lady who took it so decidedly to herself. This was the second time this night that Miss Georgiana Falconer's vanity had appropriated to herself a compliment in which she had no share. Yet, even at this moment, which, as she conceived, was a moment of triumph, while she was encircled by adorers, while

the voice of praise yet vibrated in her ears, she felt anguish at perceiving the serenity of her rival's countenance; and, however strange it may appear, actually envied Caroline for not being envious.

Mrs Falconer, skilled in every turn of her daughter's temper, which she was now obliged to follow and humour, or dexterously to counteract, lest it should ruin all schemes for her establishment, saw the cloud gathering on Zara's brow, and immediately fixed the attention of the company upon the beauty of her dress and the fine folds of her velvet train. She commenced lamentations on the difference between English and French velvets. French Clay, as she had foreseen, took up the word, and talked of *velvets* till supper was announced.

When Mrs Falconer attended Lady Trant and Lady Kew to their rooms, a nocturnal conference was held in Lady Trant's apartment, where, of course, in the most confidential manner, their ladyships sat talking over the events of the day, and of some matters too interesting to be spoken of in general society. They began to congratulate Mrs Falconer upon the impression which Zara had made on Count Altenberg; but the wily mother repressed their premature felicitations. She protested she was positively certain that the person in question had *now* no thoughts of Georgiana, such as their ladyships' partiality to her might lead them to suppose; and now, when the business was over, she might venture to declare that nothing could have persuaded her to let a daughter of hers marry a foreigner. She should have been sorry to give offence to such an amiable and well-informed young nobleman; and she really rejoiced that, if her sentiments had been, as no doubt by a person of his penetration they must have been, discovered, Count Altenberg had taken the hint without being offended: indeed, she

had felt it a point of conscience to let the truth be seen time enough to prevent his coming to a downright proposal, and having the mortification of an absolute refusal. Other mothers, she knew, might feel differently about giving a daughter to a foreigner, and other young ladies might feel differently from her Georgiana. Where there was so great an establishment in prospect, and rank, and fashion, and figure, to say nothing of talents, it could hardly be expected that such temptations should be resisted in a *certain family*, where it was so very desirable, and indeed necessary, to get a daughter married without a portion. Mrs Falconer declared that on every account she should rejoice, if things should happen to turn out so. The present object was every way worthy, and charming. She was a young lady for whom, even from the little she had seen of her, she confessed she felt uncommonly interested—putting relationship out of the question.

Thus having with able generalship secured a retreat for herself and for her daughter, Mrs Falconer retired to rest.

Early the next morning one of Lord Oldborough's grooms brought a note for Mr Percy. Commissioner Falconer's confidential servant took the note immediately up to his master's bedchamber, to inquire whether it would be proper to waken Mr Percy to give it to him, or to make the groom wait till Mr Percy should come down to breakfast.

The commissioner sat up in his bed, rubbed his eyes, read the direction of the note, many times turned and re-turned it, and desired to see the man who brought it. The groom was shown in.

"How is my lord's gout?"

"Quite well, sir: my lord was out yesterday in the park—both a horseback and a foot."

"I am very happy to hear it. And pray did any

despatches come last night from town, can you tell, sir?"

"I really can't particularly say, sir—I was out with the horses."

"But about this note?" said the commissioner.

The result of the cross-examination that followed gave reason to believe that the note contained an invitation to breakfast, because he had heard Mr Rodney, my lord's own gentleman, tell the man whose business it was to attend at breakfast that my lord would breakfast in his own room, and expected a friend to breakfast with him.

"A friend—Hum! Was there no note to me?—no message?"

"None, sir—as I know."

"Very extraordinary." Mr Falconer inclined to keep the man till breakfast-time, but he would not be kept—he had orders to return with an answer immediately; and he had been on the fidgets all the time the commissioner had been detaining him; for Lord Oldborough's messengers could not venture to delay. The note was consequently delivered to Mr Percy immediately, and Mr Percy went to breakfast at Clermont Park. The commissioner's breakfast was spoiled by the curiosity this invitation excited, and he was obliged to chew green tea for the heartburn with great diligence. Meantime the company were all talking the play over and over again, till at last, when even Zara appeared satiated with the subject, the conversation diverged a little to other topics. Unluckily French Clay usurped so large a portion of attention, that Count Altenberg's voice was for some time scarcely heard—the contrast was striking between a really well-bred polished foreigner, and a man, who, having kept bad company abroad, and having formed himself on a few bad models, presented an exaggerated imitation of those

who were ridiculous, detested, or unknown, in good society at Paris; and whom the nation would utterly disclaim as representatives of their morals or manners. At this period of their acquaintance with Count Altenberg, every circumstance which drew out his character, tastes, and opinions, was interesting to the Percy family in general, and in particular to Caroline. The most commonplace and disagreeable characters often promoted this purpose, and thus afforded means of amusement, and materials for reflection. Towards the end of breakfast, the newspapers were brought in — the commissioner, who had wondered frequently what could make them so late, seized upon the Government paper directly, which he pocketed and retired, after handing other newspapers to Count Altenberg and to the Mr Clays. English Clay, setting down his well-sugared cup of tea, leaving a happily prepared morsel of ham and bread and butter on his plate, turned his back upon the ladies; and comfortably settling himself with his arm over his chair, and the light full upon London news, began to read to himself. Count Altenberg glanced at *Continental News*, as he unfolded his paper, but instantly turned to *Gazette Extraordinary*, which he laid before Mrs Falconer. She requested him, if it was not too much trouble, to read it aloud. "I hope my foreign accent will not make it unintelligible," said he; and without farther preface, or considering how he was to appear himself, he obeyed. Though he had not a perfectly English accent, he showed that he had a thoroughly English heart, by the joy and pride he took in reading an account of a great victory.

English Clay turned round upon his chair, and setting his arms akimbo, with the newspaper still fast in his hand, and his elbow sticking out across Lady Anne Arlington, sat facing the count, and listening to him with a look of surprise. "Why, d—m'me, but you're

a good fellow after all!" exclaimed he, "though you are not an Englishman!"

"By the mother's side I am, sir," replied Count Altenberg. "I may boast that I am at least half an Englishman."

"Half is better than the whole," said French Clay scornfully.

"By the Lord, I could have sworn his mother, or some of his blood, was English!" cried English Clay. "I beg your pardon, ma'am—'fraid I annoy your ladyship?" added he, perceiving that the Lady Anne haughtily retreated from his offending elbow.

Then sensible of having committed himself by his sudden burst of feeling, he coloured all over, took up his tea, drank as if he wished to hide his face for ever in the cup, recovered his head with mighty effort, turned round again to his newspaper, and was cold and silent as before. His brother meanwhile was, or affected to be, more intent upon some *eau sucrée*, that he was preparing for himself, than upon the fate of the army and navy of Spain or England. Rising from the breakfast-table he went into the adjoining room, and threw himself at full length upon a sofa; Lady Frances Arlington, who detested politics, immediately followed, and led the way to a work-table, round which the ladies gathered, and formed themselves in a few minutes into a committee of dress, all speaking at once; Count Altenberg went with the ladies out of the breakfast-room, where English Clay would have been happy to have remained alone; but being interrupted by the entrance of the servants, he could not enjoy peaceable possession, and he was compelled also to follow:—getting as far as he could from the female committee, he took Petcalf into a window to talk of horses, and commenced a history of the colts of Regulus, and of the plates they had won.

French Clay, rising from the sofa, and adjusting his cravat at a looking-glass, carelessly said, addressing himself to Count Altenberg, "I think, M. le Comte, I heard you say something about public feelings. Now, I do not comprehend precisely what is meant by public feelings; for my part, I am free to confess that I have none."

"I certainly must have expressed myself ill," replied Count Altenberg; "I should have said, love of our country."

Mrs Percy, Rosamond, and Caroline, escaped from the committee of dress, were now eagerly listening to this conversation.

"And if you had, M. le Comte, I might, *en philosophe*, have been permitted to ask," replied French Clay, "what is love of our country, but a mere *prejudice?* and to a person of an *emancipated* mind, that word prejudice says volumes. Assuredly M. le Comte will allow, and must *feel well*, that no prejudice ever was or can be useful to mankind."

The count fully admitted that utility is the best human test by which all sentiment, as well as everything else, can be tried, but he observed that Mr Clay had not yet proved love of our country to be a useless or pernicious principle of action: and by his own argument, if it can be proved to be useful, it should not be called, in the invidious sense of the word, a prejudice.

"True—but the labour of the proof fortunately rests with you, M. le Comte."

Count Altenberg answered in French, speaking very rapidly. "It is a labour saved me fortunately, by the recorded experience of all history, by the testimony of the wisest and the best in all countries, ancient and modern—all agree in proclaiming love of our country to be one of the most powerful, most permanent

motives to good and great actions; the most expansive, elevating principle—elevating without danger—expansive without waste; the principle to which the legislator looks for the preservative against corruption in states—to which the moralist turns for the antidote against selfishness in individuals. Recollect, name any great character, ancient or modern—is not love of his country one of his virtues? Can you draw—can you conceive a great character—a great or a good character, or even a safe member of society, without it? A man hangs loose upon society, as your own Burke says——"

"Ah! M. le Comte!" cried Clay, shrinking with affected horror, "I repent—I see what I have brought upon myself; after Burke will come Cicero; and after Cicero all Rome, Carthage, Athens, Lacedemon. Oh! spare me! since I was a schoolboy, I could never *suffer* those names. Ah! M. le Comte, de grace!—I know I have put myself *in the case* to be buried alive under a load of quotations."

The count, with that good-humour which disappoints ridicule, smiled, and checked his enthusiasm.

"Is there not a kind of enthusiasm," said Mrs Percy, "which is as necessary to virtue as to genius?"

French Clay shook his head. He was sorry to differ from a lady; as a gallant man, he knew he was wrong, but as a philosopher he could not patronise enthusiasm. It was the business he apprehended of philosophy to correct and extinguish it.

"I have heard it said," interposed Rosamond, "that it is a favourite maxim of law, that the extreme of justice is the extreme of injustice—perhaps this maxim may be applied to philosophy as well as to law."

"Why extinguish enthusiasm?" cried Caroline. "It is not surely the business of philosophy to extin-

guish, but to direct it. Does not enthusiasm, well directed, give life and energy to all that is good and great?"

There was so much life and energy in Caroline's beautiful countenance, that French Clay was for a moment silenced by admiration.

"After all," resumed he, "there is one slight circumstance, which persons of feeling should consider, that the evils and horrors of war are produced by this very principle, which some people think so useful to mankind, this famous love of our country."

Count Altenberg asked, whether wars had not more frequently arisen from the unlawful fancies which princes and conquerors are apt to take for the territories of their neighbours, than from the legitimate love of their own country?

French Clay, hurried by a smile he saw on Rosamond's lips, changed his ground again for the worse, and said he was not speaking of wars, of foreign conquests, but of defensive wars, where foolish people, from an absurd love of their own country, that is, of certain barren mountains, of *a few acres of snow*, or of collections of old houses and churches, called capital cities, will expose themselves to fire, flame, and famine, and will stand to be cut to pieces inchmeal, rather than to submit to a conqueror, who might, ten to one, be a more civilized or cleverer sort of a person than their own rulers; and under whom they might enjoy all the luxuries of life—changing only the name of their country for some other equally well-sounding name; and perhaps adopting a few new laws, instead of what they might have been in the habit from their childhood of worshipping, as a wittenagemote, or a diet, or a constitution. "For my part," concluded French Clay, "I have accustomed myself to go to the bottom of things. I have *approfondied*. I have not suffered

my understanding to be paralysed—I have made my own analysis of happiness, and find that your legislators, and moralists, and patriots, would juggle me out of many solid physical comforts, by engaging me to fight for enthusiasms which do me no manner of good."

Count Altenberg's countenance had flushed with indignation, and cooled with contempt, several times during Mr Clay's speech. Beginning in a low composed voice, he first answered, whatever pretence to reason it contained, in the analysis of human happiness, he observed, Mr Clay had bounded his to physical comforts—this was reducing civilized man below even the savage, and nearly to the state of brutes. Did Mr Clay choose to leave out all intellectual pleasures—all the pleasures of self-complacency, self-approbation, and sympathy? But, supposing that he was content to bound his happiness, inelegant and low, to such narrow limits, Count Altenberg observed, he did not provide for the security even of that poor portion. If he was ready to give up the liberty or the free constitution of the country in which he resided, ready to live under tyrants and tyranny, how could he be secure for a year, a day, even an hour, of his epicurean paradise?

Mr Clay acknowledged, that "in this point of view, it might be awkward to live in a conquered country; but if a man has talents to make himself agreeable to the powers that be, and money in his purse, that can never touch him, *chacun pour soi—et honi soi qui mal y pense.*"

"Is it in England!—Oh! can it be in England, and from an Englishman, that I hear such sentiments!" exclaimed Count Altenberg. "Such I have heard on the Continent—such we have heard the precursors of the ruin, disgrace, destruction of the princes and nations of Europe!"

Some painful reflections or recollections seemed to absorb the count for a few moments.

"*Foi d'honnête homme et de philosophe*," French Clay declared, that, for his own part, he cared not who ruled or how, who was conqueror, or what was conquered, provided champagne and burgundy were left to him by the conqueror.

Rosamond thought it was a pity Mr Clay was not married to the lady who said she did not care what revolutions happened, as long as she had her roast chicken, and her little game at cards.

"Happen what will," continued French Clay, "I have two hundred thousand pounds, well counted—as to the rest, it is quite indifferent to me, whether England be called England or France; for," concluded he, walking off to the committee of dress, "after all I have heard, I recur to my first question, what is country—or, as people term it, *their native land?*"

The following lines came full into Caroline's recollection as French Clay spoke:—

> "Breathes there the man with soul so dead
> Who never to himself has said,
> This is my own, my native land?
> Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,
> As home his footsteps he hath turn'd,
> From wandering on a foreign strand?
> If such there be, go, mark him well;
> For him no minstrel raptures swell;
> High though his titles, proud his fame,
> Boundless his wealth, as wish can claim,
> Despite these titles, power and pelf,
> The wretch, concentred all in self,
> Living shall forfeit fair renown,
> And doubly dying shall go down
> To the vile dust from whence he sprung,
> Unwept, unhonour'd, and unsung."

Caroline asked Count Altenberg, who seemed well acquainted with English literature, if he had ever read Scott's Lay of the Last Minstrel?

The count smiled, and replied—

> "'Breathes there the man with soul so dead,
> Who never to himself has said'

any of those beautiful lines?"

Caroline, surprised that the count knew so well what had passed in her mind, blushed.

At this moment Mrs Falconer returned, and throwing a reconnoitring glance round the room to see how the company had disposed of themselves, was well pleased to observe French Clay leaning on the back of Georgiana's chair, and giving her his opinion about some artificial flowers. The ladies had been consulting upon the manner in which the characters in "Love in a Village,"—or "The Lord of the Manor," should be dressed, and Miss Arabella Falconer had not yet completely determined which piece or which dress she preferred. She was glad that the Percys had been kept from this committee, because, as they were not to be asked to the entertainment, it was a subject she could not discuss before them. Whenever they had approached the table, the young ladies had talked only of fashions in general; and now, as Mrs Percy and Caroline, followed by Count Altenberg, joined them, Mrs Falconer put aside a volume of plays, containing "The Lord of the Manor," &c.; and, taking up another book, said something about the immortal bard to English Clay, who happened to be near her. He replied, "I have every edition of Shakspeare that ever was printed or published, and everything that ever was written about him, good, bad, or indifferent, at Clay Hall. I made this a principle, and I think every Englishman should do the same. *Your* Mr Voltaire," added this polite Englishman, turning to Count Altenberg, "made a fine example of himself by *dashing* at *our* Shakspeare?"

"Undoubtedly, Voltaire showed he did not understand Shakspeare, and therefore did not do him justice," replied Count Altenberg. "Even Voltaire had some tinge of national prejudice, as well as other men. It was reserved for women to set us in this instance, as in many others, an example at once of superior candour and superior talent."

English Clay pulled up his boots, and with a look of cool contempt, said, "I see you are a lady's man, monsieur."

Count Altenberg replied, that if a lady's man means an admirer of the fair sex, he was proud to feel that he deserved that compliment; and with much warmth he pronounced such a panegyric upon that sex, without whom "*la commencement de la vie est sans secours, le milieu sans plaisir, et la fin sans consolation,*" that even Lady Anne Arlington raised her head from the hand on which it reclined, and every female eye turned upon him with approbation.

"Oh! what a lover he will make, if ever he is in love," cried Lady Frances Arlington, who never scrupled saying anything that came into her head. "I beg pardon, I believe I have said something very shocking. Georgiana, my dear, I protest I was not thinking of——But what a disturbance I have made amongst all your faces, ladies—and *gentlemen*," repeated her ladyship, looking archly at the count, whose face at this moment glowed manifestly; "and all because gentlemen and ladies don't mind their grammar and their tenses. Now don't you recollect —I call upon Mrs Falconer, who really has some presence of—countenance—I call upon Mrs Falconer to witness that I said if; and, pray comprehend me, M. le Comte, else I must appear excessively rude, I did not mean to say anything of the present or the past, but only of the future."

The count, recovering his presence of mind, and *presence* of *countenance*, turned to a little Cupid on the mantelpiece; and, playfully doing homage before it, repeated—

"Qui que tu sois voici ton maître,
Il l'est, le fut—ou le doit être."

"Oh! charming—oh! for a translation!" cried Mrs Falconer, glad to turn the attention from Georgiana:—"Lady Frances—ladies, some of you—Miss Percy, here's my pencil."

Here they were interrupted by Mr Percy's return from Lord Oldborough's.

The commissioner followed Mr Percy into the room, and asked, and was answered, a variety of questions about despatches from town; trying, but in vain, to find out what had been going forward. At last he ended with a look of absence, and a declaration that he was quite happy to hear that Lord Oldborough had *so* completely got rid of his gout.

"Completely," said Mr Percy; "and he desires me to tell you, that it will be necessary for him to return to town in a few days."

"In a few days!" cried the commissioner.

"In a few days!" repeated several voices, in different tones.

"In a few days!—Gracious heaven! and what will become of 'The Lord of the Manor'?" cried Miss Falconer.

"Gently, my Arabella! never raise your voice so high—you, who are a musician," said Mrs Falconer, "and so sweet a voice as you have—in general. Besides," added she, drawing her apart, "you forget that you should not speak of 'The Lord of the Manor' before the Percys, as they are not to be asked."

"To be sure. Pray keep your temper, Bell, if you

can, for a minute," whispered Miss Georgiana; "you see they have rung for the carriage."

Mrs Falconer began to entreat Mrs Percy would not be in a hurry to run away; but to her great joy the carriage came to the door.

At parting with Count Altenberg, Mr Percy said that he regretted that they were so soon to lose his company in this part of the world. "We, who live so much retired, shall feel the loss particularly."

The count, evidently agitated, only said, in a low voice, "We are not parting yet—we shall meet again —I hope—do you ever go to London?"

"Never."

"At all events, we *must* meet again," said the count.

The ladies had all collected at the open windows, to see the departure of the Percys; but Miss Georgiana Falconer could learn nothing from the manner in which the count handed Caroline into the carriage. It did not appear even that he spoke to her.

On his return, the Miss Falconers, and the Lady Arlingtons, were of course talking of those who had just left the house. There was at first but one voice in praise of Caroline's beauty and talents, elegance, and simplicity of manner. Mrs Falconer set the example; Lady Frances Arlington and Miss Georgiana Falconer extolled her in the highest terms—one to provoke, the other not to appear provoked.

"La!" said Lady Frances, "how we may mistake even the people we know best—Georgiana, can you conceive it? I never should have guessed, if you had not told me, that Miss Caroline Percy was such a favourite of yours. Do you know now, so little penetration have I, I should have thought that you rather disliked her?"

"You are quite right, my dear Lady Frances," cried

Mrs Falconer; "I give you credit for your penetration: *entre nous*, Miss Caroline Percy is no favourite of Georgiana."

Georgiana actually opened her eyes with astonishment, and thought her mother did not know what she was saying, and that she certainly did not perceive that Count Altenberg was in the room.

"Count Altenberg, is this the book you are looking for?" said the young lady, pronouncing Count Altenberg's name very distinctly, to put her mother on her guard.

Mrs Falconer continued precisely in the same tone. "Georgiana does justice, I am sure, to Miss Percy's merit and charms; but the truth is, she does not like her, and Georgiana has too much frankness to conceal it; and now come here, and I will tell you the reason." In a half whisper, but perfectly intelligible to every one in the room, Mrs Falconer went on—"Georgiana's favourite brother, Buckhurst—did you never hear it? In days of yore, there was an attachment—Buckhurst, you know, is very ardent in his attachments—desperately in love he was—and no wonder. But at that time he was nobody—he was unprovided for, and the young lady had a good fortune then—her father would have him go to the bar—against the commissioner's wishes. You know a young man will do anything if he is in love, and is encouraged—I don't know how the thing went on, or off, but Buckhurst found himself disappointed at last, and was so miserable about it! ready to break his heart! you would have pitied him! Georgiana was so sorry for him, that she never could forgive the young lady—though I really don't imagine, after all, she was to blame. But sisters will feel for their brothers."

Georgiana, charmed to find this amiable mode of accounting for her dislike to Caroline, instantly pursued

her mother's hint, and frankly declared that she never could conceal either her likings or dislikings—that Miss Caroline Percy might have all the merit upon earth, and she did not doubt but she had; yet she never could forgive her for jilting Buckhurst—no, never! never! It might be unjust, but she owned that it was a prepossession she could not conquer.

"Why, indeed, my dear young lady, I hardly know how to blame you," cried Lady Trant; "for certainly a jilt is not a very amiable character."

"O! my dear Lady Trant, don't use such a word ——Georgiana!—Why will you be so warm, so very unguarded, where that darling brother is concerned? You really——Oh! my dear Lady Trant, this must not go farther—and positively the word jilt must never be used again; for I'm confident it is quite inapplicable."

"I'd not swear for that," cried Lady Trant; "for now I recollect, at Lady Angelica Headingham's, what was it we heard, my dear Lady Kew, about her coquetting with that Mr Barclay, who is now going to be married to Lady Mary Pembroke, you know?"

"Oh! yes, I did hear something, I recollect—but, at the time, I never minded, because I did not know, then, who that Miss Caroline Percy was—true, true, I recollect it now. And all, you know, we heard about her and Sir James Harcourt—was there not something there? By all accounts, it is plain she is not the simple country beauty she looks—practised! —practised! you see."

Miss Georgiana Falconer's only fear was, that Count Altenberg might not hear Lady Kew, who had lowered her voice to the note of mystery. Mrs Falconer, who had accomplished her own judicious purpose, of accounting for Georgiana's dislike of Miss Caroline Percy, was now afraid that her dear friends would overdo the business; she made many efforts to stop

them, but once upon the scent of scandal, it was no easy matter to change the pursuit.

"You seem to have found something that has caught your attention delightfully, Count Altenberg," said Mrs Falconer: "how I envy any one who is completely *in* a book—what is it?"

"Johnson's preface to Shakspeare."

Miss Georgiana Falconer was vexed, for she recollected that Miss Caroline Percy had just been speaking of it with admiration.

Mrs Falconer wondered how it could have happened that she had never read it.

Lady Kew persevered in her story. "Sir James Harcourt, I know, who is the most polite creature in the whole world, and who never speaks an ill word of anybody, I assure you, said of Miss Caroline Percy in my hearing—what I shall not repeat. Only this much I must tell you, Mrs Falconer—Mrs Falconer!——She won't listen because the young lady is a relation of her own—and we are very rude; but truth is truth, notwithstanding, you know. Well, well, she may talk of Miss Percy's beauty and abilities—very clever she is, I don't dispute; but this I may say, that Mrs Falconer must never praise her to me for simplicity of character."

"Why, no," said Miss Georgiana; "one is apt to suppose that a person who has lived all her life in the country must, of course, have great simplicity. But there is a simplicity of character, and a simplicity of manner, and they don't always go together. Caroline Percy's manner is fascinating, because, you know, it is what one does not meet with every day in town—that was what struck my poor brother—that and her great talents, which can make her whatever she pleases to be: but I am greatly afraid she is not quite the *ingenuous* person she looks."

Count Altenberg changed colour, and was putting down his book suddenly, when Mrs Falconer caught it, and stopping him, asked how far he had read.

Whilst he was turning over the leaves, Lady Trant went on, in her turn—"With all her *practice*, or her *simplicity*, whichever it may be—far be it from me to decide which—I fancy she has met with her match, and has been disappointed in her turn."

"Really!" cried Georgiana eagerly: "How! What! When!—are you certain?"

"Last summer—Oh! I have it from those who know the gentleman well. Only an affair of the heart that did not end happily: but I am told she was very much in love. The family would not hear of it—the mother, especially, was averse: so the young gentleman ended by marrying—exceedingly well—and the young lady by wearing the willow, you know, a decent time."

"Oh! why did you never tell me this before?" said Miss Georgiana.

"I protest I never thought of it, till Lady Kew brought it to my recollection, by talking of Lady Angelica Headingham, and Sir James Harcourt, and all that."

"But who was the gentleman?"

"That's a secret," replied Lady Trant.

"A secret!—A secret!—What is it? What is it?" cried Lady Frances Arlington, pressing into the midst of the party; for she was the most curious person imaginable.

Then heads joined, and Lady Trant whispered, and Lady Frances exclaimed aloud, "Hungerford?—Colonel Hungerford!"

"Fie! fie! Lady Frances," cried Georgiana—and "Fie! fie! you are a pretty person to keep a secret," cried Lady Trant: "I vow I'll never trust your lady-

ship with a secret again—when you publish it in this way."

"I vow you will," said Lady Frances. "Why, you all know, in your hearts, you wish to publish it—else why tell it—especially to me? But all this time I am not thinking in the least about the matter, nor was I when I said *Hungerford*—I was and am thinking of my own affairs. What did I do with the letter I received this morning? I had it here—no, I hadn't it—yes, I had—Anne!—Anne!—Lady Anne! the duchess's letter: I gave it to you; what did you do with it?"

"La! it is somewhere, I suppose," said Lady Anne, raising her head, and giving a vague look round the room

Lady Frances made every one search their work-boxes, writing-boxes, and reticules; then went from table to table, opening and shutting all the drawers.

"Frances!—If you would not fly about so! What can it signify?" expostulated Lady Anne. But in vain; her sister went on, moving everything and everybody in the room, displacing all the cushions of all the chairs in her progress, and, at last, approached Lady Anne's sofa, with intent to invade her repose.

"Ah! Frances!" cried Lady Anne, in a deprecating tone, with a gesture of supplication and anguish in her eyes, "do let me rest!"

"Never, till I have the letter."

With the energy of anger and despair Lady Anne made an effort to reach the bell-cord—but it missed—the cord swung—Petcalf ran to catch it, and stumbled over a stool—English Clay stood still and laughed—French Clay exclaimed, "*Ah! mon Dieu! Cupidon!*"

Count Altenberg saved Cupid from falling, and rang the bell.

"Sir," said Lady Anne to the footman, "I had a letter—some time this morning, in my hand."

"Yes, my lady."

"I want it."

"Yes, my lady."

"Pray, sir, tell somebody to tell Pritchard, to tell Flora, to go upstairs to my dressing-room, sir, to look everywhere for't; and let it be brought to my sister, Lady Frances, if you please, sir."

"No, no, sir, don't do anything about the matter, if you please—I will go myself," said Lady Frances.

Away the lady ran upstairs, and down again, with the letter in her hand.

"Yes! exactly as I thought," cried she; "my aunt does say, that Mrs Hungerford is to be down to-day—I thought so."

"Very likely," said Lady Anne; "I never thought about it."

"But, Anne, you must think about it, for my aunt desires we should go and see her directly."

"I can't go," said Lady Anne—"I've a cold—your going will do."

"Mrs Falconer, my dear Mrs Falconer, will you go with me to-morrow to Hungerford Castle?" cried Lady Frances eagerly.

"Impossible! my dear Lady Frances, unfortunately quite impossible. The Hungerfords and we have no connexion—there was an old family quarrel——"

"Oh! never mind family quarrels and connexions—you can go, and I am sure it will be taken very well—and you know you only go with me. Oh! positively you must—now there's my good dear Mrs Falconer—yes, and order the carriage this minute for to-morrow early," said Lady Frances, in a coaxing yet impatient tone.

Mrs Falconer adhered to its being absolutely impossible.

"Then, Anne, you must go."

No—Anne was impenetrable.

"Then I'll go by myself," cried Lady Frances pettishly—"I'll take Pritchard with me, in our own carriage, and I'll speak about it directly—for go I must and will."

"Now, Frances, what new fancy is this for Mrs Hungerford? I am sure you used not to care about her," said Lady Anne.

"And I dare say I should not care about her now," replied Lady Frances, "but that I am dying to see an old pair of shoes she has."

"An old pair of shoes!" repeated Lady Anne, with a look of unutterable disdain.

"An old pair of shoes!" cried Mrs Falconer, laughing.

"Yes, a pair of blue damask shoes as old as Edward the Fourth's time—with chains from the toe to the knee, you know—or do you know, Count Altenberg? Miss Percy was describing them—she saw Colonel Hungerford put them on—Oh! he must put them on for me—I'll make him put them on, chains and all, to-morrow."

"Colonel Hungerford is on his way to India by this time," said Georgiana Falconer drily.

"May I ask," said Count Altenberg, taking advantage of the first pause in the conversation—"may I ask if I understood rightly, that Mrs Hungerford, mother of Colonel Hungerford, lives in this neighbourhood, and is coming into the country to-morrow?"

"Yes—just so," said Lady Frances.

What concern can it be of his? thought Miss Georgiana Falconer, fixing her eyes upon the count with alarmed curiosity.

"I knew Colonel Hungerford abroad," continued the count, "and have a great regard for him."

Lady Kew, Lady Trant, and Miss Georgiana Falconer, exchanged looks.

"I am sorry that he is gone to India," said Mrs Falconer, in a sentimental tone; "it would have been so pleasant to you to have renewed an acquaintance with him in England."

Count Altenberg regretted the absence of his friend, the colonel; but, turning to Lady Frances, he congratulated himself upon having an opportunity of presenting his letters of introduction, and paying his respects to Mrs Hungerford, of whom he had heard much from foreigners who had visited England, and who had been charmed with her, and with her daughter, Mrs Mortimer—his letters of introduction had been addressed to her town residence, but she was not in London when he was there.

"No, she was at Pembroke," said Lady Kew.

I'm sure I wish she was there still, thought Miss Georgiana.

"But, after all, Lady Frances, is the duchess sure that Mrs Hungerford is actually come to the country? —May be, she is still in town."

"I shall have the honour of letting your ladyship know; for, if Lord Oldborough will permit, I shall certainly go, very soon, to pay my respects at Hungerford Castle," said Count Altenberg.

The prescient jealousy of Miss Georgiana Falconer boded ill of this visit to Hungerford Castle. A few days afterwards a note was received from Count Altenberg, returning many thanks to Mr and Mrs Falconer for the civilities he had received from them, paying all proper compliments to Zara, announcing his intention of accepting an invitation to stay some time at Mrs Hungerford's, and taking a polite leave of the Falconer family.

Here was a death-blow to all Georgiana's hopes!

But we shall not stay to describe her disappointment, or the art of her mother in concealing it; nor shall we accompany Mrs Falconer to town, to see how her designs upon the Clays or Petcalf prospered. We must follow Count Altenberg to Hungerford Castle.

Chapter xxix.

"Who would prize the tainted posies,
Which on ev'ry breast are worn?
Who could pluck the spotless roses
From their never touched thorn?"

THE feeling expressed in these lines will be acknowledged by every man of sense and delicacy. "No such man ever prized a heart much hackneyed in the ways of love." It was with exquisite pain that Count Altenberg had heard all that had been said of Caroline—he did not give credit to half the insinuations—he despised those who made them: he knew that some of the ladies spoke from envy, others from the mere love of scandal; but still, altogether, an impression unfavourable to Caroline, or rather unfavourable to his passion for Caroline, was left on his mind. The idea that she had been suspected, the certainty that she had been talked of, that she had even been named as one who had coquetted with many admirers—the notion that she had been in love—passionately in love—all this took from the freshness, the virgin modesty, the dignity, the charm, with which she had appeared to his imagination, and without which she could not have touched his heart—a heart not to be easily won.

In his own country, at the court where he resided, in the different parts of the Continent which he had visited, Germany, Poland, Switzerland, France, he had

seen women celebrated for beauty and for wit, many of the most polished manners, many of the highest accomplishments, some of exquisite sensibility, a few with genuine simplicity of character, but in all there had been something which had prevented his wishing to make any one of them the companion of his life. In some there was a want of good temper—in others of good sense; there was some false taste for admiration or for notoriety—some love of pleasure, or some love of sway, inconsistent with his idea of the perfection of the female character, incompatible with his plans of life, and with his notions of love and happiness.

In England, where education, institutions, opinion, manners, the habits of society, and of domestic life, happily combine to give the just proportion of all that is attractive, useful, ornamental, and amiable, to the female character—in England, Count Altenberg had hopes of finding a woman who, to the noble simplicity of character that was once the charm of Switzerland, joined the polish, the elegance, that was once the pride of France; a woman possessing an enlarged, cultivated, embellished understanding, capable of comprehending all his views as a politician and a statesman; yet without any wish for power, or love of political intrigue. Graced with knowledge and taste for literature and science, capable of being extended to the highest point of excellence, yet free from all pedantry, or pretension —with wit, conversational talents, and love of good society, without that desire of exhibition, that devouring diseased appetite for admiration, which preys upon the mind insatiably, to its torture—to its destruction; without that undefinable, untranslatable French love of *succès de société*, which substitutes a precarious, factitious, intoxicated existence in public, for the safe self-approbation, the sober, the permanent happiness of domestic life. In England Count Altenberg hoped

to find a woman raised by "divine philosophy" * far above all illiberal prejudice, but preserving a just and becoming sense of religion; unobtrusive, mild, and yet firm. Everything that he had seen of Caroline had confirmed his first hope, and exalted his future expectation; but, by what he had just heard, his imagination was checked in full career, suddenly, and painfully. His heavenly dream was disturbed by earthly voices—voices of malignant spirits—mysterious —indistinct—yet alarming. He had not conceived it possible that the breath of blame could approach such a character as Caroline's—he was struck with surprise, and shocked, on hearing her name profaned by common scandal, and spoken of as the victim of a disappointed passion, the scorn of one of the most distinguished families in England. Such were the first painful thoughts and feelings of Count Altenberg. At the time he heard the whispers which gave rise to them, he had been actually planning a letter to his father, declaring his attachment—he now resolved not to write. But he determined to satisfy himself as to the truth or falsehood of these reports. He was not a man to give ear lightly to calumny—he detested its baseness; he would not suffer himself for a moment to brood over suspicion, nor yet would he allow himself for present ease and pleasure to gloss over, without examination, that which might afterwards recur to his mind, and might create future unjust or unhappy jealousy. Either the object of his hopes was worthy of him, or not—if not worthy, better tear her from his heart for ever. This determined him to go immediately to Mrs Hungerford's. Count Altenberg trusted to his own address and penetration for discovering all he wished to know, without betraying any peculiar interest in the subject.

* Milton.

The first sight of Mrs Hungerford, the gracious dignity of her appearance, and manners, the first five minutes' conversation he had with her, decided him in the opinion, that common report had done her justice; and raised in his mind extreme anxiety to know her opinion of Caroline. But, though he began the history of Zara, and of the play at Falconer Court, for the express purpose of introducing the Percys, in speaking of the company who had been present, yet, conscious of some unusual emotion when he was going to pronounce that name, and fancying some meaning in Mrs Hungerford's great attention as he spoke, he mentioned almost every other guest, even the most insignificant, without speaking of Caroline, or of any of her family. He went back to his friend Colonel Hungerford. Mrs Hungerford opened a letter-case, and took from it the last letter she had received from her son since he left England, containing some interesting particulars.—Towards the conclusion of the letter, the writing changed to a small feminine hand, and all India vanished from the view of Count Altenberg, for, as he turned the page, he saw the name of Caroline Percy: "I suppose I ought to stop here," said he, offering the letter to Mrs Hungerford. "No," she replied, the whole letter was at his service—they were only a few lines from her daughter Lady Elizabeth.

These few lines mentioned Caroline Percy among the dear and intimate friends whom she regretted most in Europe, and to whom she sent a message expressive of the warmest affection and esteem. A glow of joy instantly diffused itself over his whole frame. As far as related to Colonel Hungerford, he was sure that all he had heard was false. There was little probability that his wife should, if those circumstances were true, be Caroline's most intimate friend. Before these thoughts had well arranged themselves in his head, a pleasing,

sprightly young lady came into the room, who he at first thought was Mrs Hungerford's daughter; but she was too young to answer exactly the description of Mrs Mortimer.

"Lady Mary Pembroke, my niece," said Mrs Hungerford.

Her ladyship was followed by Mr Barclay—— Count Altenberg seemed in a fair way to have all his doubts satisfied; but, in the hurry of his mind, he had almost forgotten to ask for Mrs Mortimer.

"You will not see her to-day," said Mrs Hungerford; "she is gone to see some friends, who live at a distance too great for a morning visit. But I hope," continued Mrs Hungerford, turning to Lady Mary, "that my daughter will make me amends for losing a day of her company, by bringing me our dear Caroline to-morrow."

"Is there a chance of Caroline coming to us?" cried Lady Mary with affectionate eagerness.

"Is there any hope of our seeing Miss Caroline Percy?" said Mr Barclay, with an air of respectful regard, very different from what must have been the feelings of a man who had trifled with a woman, or who had thought that she had trifled with him.

Count Altenberg rejoiced that he had come without a moment's delay to Hungerford Castle.

"You are really a good creature, my dear," continued Mrs Hungerford to Lady Mary, "for being so anxious to have Caroline here—many a niece might be jealous of my affection, for certainly I love her as well as if she were my own child. To-morrow, sir," said she, turning to Count Altenberg, "I hope I shall have the pleasure to introduce you to this young friend of ours: I shall feel proud to show her to a foreigner, whom I wish to prepossess in favour of my countrywomen."

The count said that he had already had the honour of being presented to Miss Caroline Percy—that he had seen her frequently at Falconer Court, and at her own home—and that he was not surprised at the interest which she excited at Hungerford Castle. Count Altenberg showed the interest she had excited in his own mind, whilst he pronounced, in the most sober manner in his power, those few words.

Mrs Hungerford perceived it, nor had it escaped her observation, that he had forborne to mention the name of Percy when enumerating the persons he had met at Falconer Court. She was both too well-bred in general, and too discreet on Caroline's account, to take any notice of this circumstance. She passed immediately and easily to a different subject of conversation.

The next day Mrs Mortimer returned with Caroline. The count saw the affection with which she was embraced by Mrs Hungerford. The family had crowded to the door of the antechamber to receive her, so that Caroline, encompassed with friends, could not immediately see the count, and he enjoyed these moments so exquisitely, that the idea which had previously engrossed all his soul, anxiety to see how she would look on meeting him thus unexpectedly, was absolutely forgotten. When the crowd opened, and Mrs Hungerford led her forward, a smile of frank surprise and pleasure appeared on her countenance upon seeing Count Altenberg; but her colour had been previously so much raised, and so much pleasure had sparkled in her eyes, that there was no judging what share of emotion was to be attributed to this surprise. He was, and he had reason to be, satisfied with perceiving that in the midst of the first pleasure of meeting intimate friends, and when she did not expect to meet any but friends, she was not chilled

by the sight of one who was, to her, as yet but a new acquaintance.

After introducing Count Altenberg to Mrs Mortimer, Mrs Hungerford said, "Till I had my daughter and all my friends in full force about me, I prudently did not make any attempt, Count Altenberg, upon your liberty; but now that you see my resources, I trust you will surrender yourself, without difficulty, my prisoner, as long as we can possibly detain you in this castle."

Never was man less disposed to refuse an invitation than Count Altenberg at this moment. He wrote to Mrs Falconer immediately that farewell note which had shocked Miss Georgiana so much.

As Lord Oldborough was preparing to return to town, and likely to be engrossed by ministerial business, his lordship, with less reluctance, relinquished his company; and the count, with infinite satisfaction, found himself established at once upon a footing of intimacy at Hungerford Castle. The letter he had intended to write to his father was now written and sent; but it was expressed in yet stronger terms than he had originally designed—he concluded by conjuring his father, as he valued the happiness of his son, not to take a step in any of the treaties of marriage that had been planned for him, and besought him to write as soon as it was possible, to relieve his mind from suspense, and to set him at liberty to declare his attachment, if, upon further acquaintance with the English lady who had touched his heart, he should feel any hope of making such an impression on her affections as could induce her to make for him the great sacrifice of country, family, and friends. In the meantime, the hours and days passed on most happily at Hungerford Castle. Every succeeding day discovered to him some new excellence in the object of his affection. Mrs

Hungerford, with judicious, delicate kindness, forbore all attempts to display even those qualities and talents in Caroline which she most valued, certain that she might safely leave them to the discernment of her lover. That Count Altenberg loved, Mrs Hungerford had too much penetration to doubt; and it rejoiced her heart, and satisfied all her hopes, to see a prospect of her young friend being united to such a man. Mrs Mortimer felt as much joy and as much delicacy upon the subject as her mother showed.

In that near examination in domestic life, so dangerous to many women of the highest pretensions, Caroline shone superior. His love, approved by the whole strength of his reason, and exalted by the natural enthusiasm of his temper, was now at the highest. His impatience was extreme for the arrival of that answer to his letter, which he hoped would set him at liberty to declare his passion.

The letter at last arrived; very different were its contents from what he had hoped. A previous letter from his father to him, sent in a packet with Government despatches by Mr Cunningham Falconer, had not reached him. That letter, of which his father now sent him a copy, contained an account of the steps which had been taken, relative to a treaty of marriage between his son and the Countess Christina, a lady of high birth, beauty, and talents, who had lately appeared for the first time at that court. Count Altenberg's father described the countess as one who, he was sure, must charm his son; and as the alliance was eagerly desired by the lady's friends, and in every respect honourable for his whole family, the old count was impatient to have the affair concluded. Receiving no answer to this letter, and pressed by circumstances, he had gone forward in his son's name with the treaty, and had pledged him so far, that there was

now, he declared, no possibility of retracting with honour. He lamented that his son should, in the meantime, have taken a fancy to an English lady; but, as Count Albert's letter gave the assurance to his family that he would not take any decisive step till he should receive an answer, nothing could have been done in England that could commit his honour—absence would soon efface a transient impression—the advantages of the alliance proposed in his own country would appear stronger the more they should be examined—the charms of the Countess Christina, with her superior understanding, would have an irresistible effect; "and," concluded the old count, "I beseech you, my dear Albert, as your friend—I will say more —*I command you as your father*, return to your own country as soon as you can obtain passports after receiving this letter."

Count Altenberg would have left Hungerford Castle immediately, but he had still a lingering hope that his last letter to his father would produce a change in his mind, and for an answer to this he determined to wait; but a sudden change appeared in his manner: he was grave and absent; instead of seeking Caroline's company and conversation as usual, he studiously avoided her; and when he did speak to her, his behaviour was so cold and reserved—so unlike his natural or his former manner, that the difference struck not only Caroline herself, but Rosamond and Mrs Percy, who were, at this time, at Hungerford Castle. It happened that, on the very day, and nearly at the very hour, when Count Altenberg received this letter from his father, of which no one knew anything but himself, there arrived at Hungerford Castle another of Mrs Hungerford's nieces, a young lady of uncommon beauty, and of the most attractive and elegant manners, Lady Florence Pembroke. She was just returned

from Italy with an uncle, who had resided there for some time. Count Altenberg, from the moment he was introduced to Lady Florence, devoted to her his whole attention—he sat beside her—whenever he conversed, his conversation was addressed to her; and the evident absence of mind he occasionally betrayed, and all the change in his manner, seemed to have been caused by her ladyship's appearance. Some sage philosophers know little more of cause and effect than that the one precedes the other; no wonder then that Rosamond, not famous for the accuracy of her reasoning, should, in this instance, be misled by appearances. To support her character for prudence, she determined not to seem to observe what passed, and not to mention her suspicions to her sister; who, as she remarked, was sensible of the count's altered manner; and who, as she rightly conjectured, did not perceive it with indifference. The accomplishments, good sense, and exalted sentiments of Count Altenberg, and the marked attentions he had paid her, had made an unusual impression on the mind of Caroline. He had never declared his love, but involuntarily it had betrayed itself on several occasions. Insensibly Caroline was thus led to feel for him more than she dared to avow even to herself, when the sudden change in his manner awakened her from this delightful forgetfulness of every object that was unconnected with her new feelings, and suddenly arrested her steps as she seemed entering the paradise of love and hope.

At night, when they were retiring to rest, and Caroline and Rosamond were in their mother's room, Rosamond, unable longer to keep her prudent silence, gave vent to her indignation against Count Altenberg in general reflections upon the fickleness of man. Even men of the best understanding were, she said, but children of a larger growth—pleased with change—

preferring always the newest to the fairest, or the best. Caroline did not accede to these accusations.

Rosamond, astonished and provoked, exclaimed, "Is it possible that you are so blind as not to see that Count Altenberg——" Rosamond stopped short, for she saw Caroline's colour change. She stood beside her mother motionless, and with her eyes fixed on the ground. Rosamond moved a chair towards her.

"Sit down, my dear love," said her mother, tenderly taking Caroline's hand—"sit down and compose yourself."

"My dear mother, you required one, and but one promise from me—I gave it you, firmly intending to keep it; and yet I fear that you will think I have broken it. I promised to tell you whenever I felt the first symptom of preference for any person. I did not know my own mind till this day. Indeed I thought I felt nothing but what everybody else expressed, esteem and admiration."

"In common minds," replied Mrs Percy, "esteem and admiration may be very safely distant from love; but in such a mind as yours, Caroline, the step from perfect esteem to love is dangerously near—scarcely perceptible."

"Why dangerously?" cried Rosamond: "why should not perfect love follow perfect esteem? that is the very thing I desire for Caroline. I am sure he *is* attached to her, and he is all we could wish for her, and——"

"Stop!" cried Caroline. "Oh! my dear sister! as you wish me to be good and happy, name him to me no more—for it cannot be."

"Why?" exclaimed Rosamond, with a look of dismay: "Why cannot it be? It can, it must—it shall be."

Caroline sighed, and turning from her sister, as if she dreaded to listen to her, she repeated, "No;—I will not flatter myself—I see that it cannot be—I have observed the change in his manner. The pain it gave me first awakened me to the state of my own affections. I have given you some proof of sincerity by speaking thus immediately of the impression made on my mind. You will acknowledge the effort was difficult.—Mother, will you answer me one question—which I am afraid to ask—did you, or do you think that anybody else perceived my sentiments by my manner?" Caroline paused, and her mother and sister set her heart at ease on that point.

"After all," said Rosamond, addressing herself to her mother, "I may be mistaken in what I hinted about Count Altenberg. I own I thought the change in his manner arose from Lady Florence Pembroke—I am sorry I said anything of it—I dare say when he sees more of her—she is very pretty, very pleasing, very elegant, and amiable, no doubt; but surely, in comparison with Caroline—but I am not certain that there is any rivalship in the case."

"I am certain that there shall be none," said Caroline. "How extraordinary it is that the best, the noblest, the most delightful feelings of the heart, may lead to the meanest, the most odious! I have, within a few hours, felt enough to be aware of this. I will leave nothing to chance. A woman should never expose herself to any hazard. I will preserve my peace of mind, my own esteem. I will preserve my dear and excellent friends; and that I may preserve some of them, I am sensible that I must now quit them."

Mrs Percy was going to speak, but Rosamond interposed.

"Oh! what have I done!" exclaimed she: "imprudent creature that I was, why did I speak? why

did I open your eyes, Caroline? I had resolved not to say a single word of the change I perceived in the count."

"And did you think I should not perceive it?" said Caroline. "Oh, you little know how quickly—the first look—the first tone of his voice——But of that I will think no more. Only let me assure you, that you, my dear Rosamond, did no harm—it was not what anybody said that alarmed me: before you pointed it out, I had felt that change in his manner, for which I cannot account."

"You cannot account?—Can you doubt that Lady Florence is the cause?" said Rosamond.

"Yes, I have grave doubts," said Caroline.

"So have I," said Mrs Percy.

"I cannot believe," said Caroline, "that a man of his sense and character would be so suddenly captivated: I do not mean to detract from Lady Florence's merits, but before they could make the impression you suspect on Count Altenberg there must have been time for them to be known and appreciated. Shall I go on, and tell you all that has passed in my mind? Yes, my mother and sister should see me as I am—perhaps under the delusion of vanity—or self-love—or—— But if I am wrong, you will set me right—you will help me to set myself right: it has never been declared in words, therefore perhaps I am vain and presumptuous to believe or to imagine—yet I do feel persuaded that I am preferred—that I am——"

"Loved! O yes!" said Rosamond, "a thousand times I have thought so, I have felt certain, that Count Altenberg loved you; but now I am convinced, alas! of my mistake—convinced at least that his love is of that light, changeable sort, which is not worth having—not worth your having."

"That last," cried Caroline, "I can never believe."

She stopped, and blushed deeply. "What does my mother say?" added she, in a timid voice.

"My mother, I am sure, thought once that he loved Caroline—did not you, mother?" said Rosamond.

"Yes, my dear," answered Mrs Percy, "I have thought so, and I am not yet convinced that we were mistaken; but I entirely agree with Caroline that this is a subject upon which we ought not to let our thoughts dwell."

"Oh! so I have thought, so I have said on former occasions, how often, how sincerely!" said Caroline. "But this is the first time I ever felt it difficult to practise what I know to be wise and right. Mother, I beg it as a favour that you will take me away from this place—this place, where but yesterday I thought myself so happy!"

"But why, Caroline—why, mother, should she do this?" expostulated Rosamond. "If she thinks, if you think that he loves her, if you do not believe that he has changed, if you do not believe that he is struck with a new face, why should Caroline go? For Heaven's sake do not take her away till you are sure that it is necessary."

"I will be guided by her opinion," said Mrs Percy; "I can depend entirely on her own prudence."

"Indeed, I think it will be most prudent that I should not indulge myself in staying longer," said Caroline. "From what I have seen of Count Altenberg, we have reason to think that he acts in general from wise and good motives. We should therefore believe that in the present instance his motives are good and adequate—I cannot suspect that he acts from caprice: what the nature of the obstacle may be, I can only guess; but I am inclined to think that some opposing duty——"

"His duty," said Rosamond, "I suppose he must have known before to-day. What new duty can he have discovered? No, no; men are not so very apt in love matters to think of opposing duties as women do: much more likely that he has heard something to your disadvantage, Caroline, from the Falconers. I can tell you that Lady Frances Arlington gave me a hint that strange things had been said, and great pains taken to misrepresent you to the count."

"If injurious representations have been made of me to him," replied Caroline, "he will in time discover the falsehood of such report; or, if he believe them without examination, he is not what I imagine him to be. No; I am convinced he has too noble a mind, too just an understanding, to be misled by calumny."

Mrs Percy declared she was decidedly of this opinion. "The obstacle, whatever it may be, my dear mother," continued Caroline, with the earnest tone and expression of countenance of a person of strong mind, at once feeling and thinking deeply, "the difficulty, whatever it is, must be either such as time will obviate or increase; the obstacle must be either conquerable or unconquerable: if he love me, as I thought he did, if he have the energy of character I think he possesses, he will conquer it, if it can be conquered; if it be unconquerable, what misery, what madness, to suffer my affections to be irrevocably engaged! or what base vanity to wish, if it were in my power, to inspire him with an unhappy passion! Then, in every point of view, mother, surely it is best that I should leave this—dangerous place," said Caroline, smiling. "Yet you are both so happy here, I am sorry to be the cause."

"My love," said her mother, "to us all things are trifles, compared with what it is right and becoming that you should do. I entirely approve and applaud

your prudence and resolution: what you desire shall be done as soon as possible. We will go home to-morrow morning."

"But, my dear ma'am! so suddenly! consider," cried Rosamond, "how very strange this will appear to Mrs Hungerford, and to everybody!"

"My dear Rosamond, these are some of the small difficulties, the false delicacies, which so often prevent people from doing what is right, or what is essentially necessary for the security of the peace and happiness of their whole lives," said Mrs Percy.

"That is true," replied Rosamond; "and I do not object to doing the thing, but I only wish we had some good, decent excuse for running away: you don't expect that Mrs Hungerford will part with you without remonstrance, without struggle, without even inquiring, why you must run away? I am sure I hope she will not ask me, for I am not prepared with an answer, and my face would never do, and would give way at the first glance of her penetrating eye—what will you say to Mrs Hungerford?"

"The truth," replied Caroline. "Mrs Hungerford has ever treated me with so much kindness, has shown me so much affection and esteem, feels such a warm interest in all that concerns me, and is herself of so noble a character, that she commands my entire confidence—and she shall have it without reserve. Since my mother agrees with me in thinking that Lady Florence has not been in any degree the cause of the change of manner we have observed, there can be no impropriety on that account in our speaking of the subject to Mrs Hungerford. It may be painful, humiliating—but what is meant by confidence, by openness towards our friends?—We are all of us ready enough to confess our virtues," said she, smiling; "but our weaknesses, what humbles our pride to

acknowledge, we are apt to find some delicate reason for keeping secret. Mother, if you do not disapprove of it, I wish you to tell Mrs Hungerford the whole truth."

Mrs Percy entirely approved of Caroline's placing confidence in this excellent friend. She observed, that this was very different from the girlish gossiping sort of *confidences*, which are made often from one young lady to another, merely from the want of something to say, or the pleasure of prattling about love, or the hope of being encouraged by some weak young friend to indulge some foolish passion.

The next morning, before Mrs Hungerford had left her apartment, Mrs Percy went to her, and explained the reasons which induced Caroline to refuse herself the pleasure of prolonging her visit at Hungerford Castle.

Mrs Hungerford was touched by the confidence which Caroline placed in her. "Believe me," said she, "it is not misplaced—I feel all its value. And must I lose her? I never parted with her without regret, and that regret increases the more I see of her. I almost forget that she is not my own, till I am called upon to relinquish her: but much as I value her, much as I enjoy her society, I cannot be so selfish as to wish to detain her when her peace of mind is at stake. How few, how very few are there, of all the various young women I know, who would have the good sense and resolution, I will say it, the integrity of mind, to act as she does! There is usually some sentimental casuistry, some cowardly fear, or lingering hope, that prevents young people in these circumstances from doing the plain right thing—anything but the plain right thing they are ready to do—and there is always some delicate reason for not telling the truth, especially to their friends; but *our* daughters, Mrs Percy, are

above these things." With respect to Count Altenberg, Mrs Hungerford said that, from many observations she had made, she felt no doubt of his being strongly attached to Caroline. "Their characters, their understandings, are suited to each other; they have the same high views, the same magnanimity. With one exception—you must allow a mother's partiality to make an exception in favour of her own son—with one exception, Count Altenberg is the man of all others to whom I could wish to see Caroline united. I never till yesterday doubted that it would be; but I was as much struck with the change in his manner as you have been. I agree with Caroline, that some obstacle, probably of duty, has arisen, and I hope—but no, I will imitate her example, and as you tell me she forbids herself to hope, so will I—if possible. At all events she raises herself, high as she was in my esteem, still higher by her present conduct. Tell her so, my dear Mrs Percy—you, her mother, may give this praise, without hurting her delicacy; and tell her, that, old as I am, I have not forgotten so completely the feelings of my youth, as not to be aware that suspense in some situations is the worst of evils. She may be assured that my attention shall be as much awake as even her mother's could be—and when anything that I think important or decisive occurs, she shall hear from me immediately, or see me, unless I should lose the use of my limbs, or my faculties."

A messenger came to summon Mrs Hungerford to breakfast—soon afterwards a ride was proposed by Mrs Mortimer. Count Altenberg was to be one of this party, and he looked for a moment surprised and disappointed, when he found that Caroline was not going with them; but he forbore to ask why she did not ride, and endeavoured to occupy himself solely in helping Mrs Mortimer to mount her horse—Rosamond

was glad to perceive that he did not well know what he was doing.

Before they returned from their ride, the Percys were on their way to the Hills. Till this moment the sight of home, even after a short absence, had, on returning to it, always been delightful to Caroline; but now, for the first time in her life, every object seemed to have lost its brightness. In the stillness of retirement, which she used to love, she felt something sad and lifeless. The favourite glade, which formerly she thought the very spot so beautifully described by Dryden, as the scene of his "Flower and the Leaf," even this she found had lost its charm. New to love, Caroline was not till now aware that it throws a radiance upon every object, which, when passed away, seems to leave all nature changed.

To banish recollections which she knew that she ought not to indulge, she employed herself unremittingly. But her mind did not turn with its wonted energy to her occupations, nor was it acted upon by those small motives of ordinary life by which it had formerly been excited. When reading, her thoughts would wander even from her favourite authors: every subject they discussed would remind her of some conversation that had passed at Hungerford Castle; some coincidence or difference of opinion would lead her to digress; some observation more just or more striking; some better expression, or some expression which pleased her better than the author's, would occur, and the book was laid down. These digressions of fancy were yet more frequent when she was endeavouring to fix her attention to drawing, needlework, or to any other sedentary employment. Exercise she found useful. She spent more time than usual in planting and in gardening—a simple remedy;

but practical philosophy frequently finds those simple remedies the best which Providence has put within the reach of all.

One morning, soon after her return home, when she was alone and busy in her garden, she heard voices at a distance; as they approached nearer, she thought she distinguished Mrs Hungerford's. She listened, and looked towards the path whence the voices had come. All was silent—but, a minute afterwards, she saw Mrs Hungerford coming through the narrow path in the thicket: Caroline at first sprang forward to meet her, then stopped short, her heart beating violently—she thought that, perhaps, Mrs Hungerford was accompanied by Count Altenberg; but she was alone. Ashamed of the hope which had glanced across her mind, and of the sudden stop which had betrayed her thoughts, Caroline now went forward, blushing.

Mrs Hungerford embraced her with tenderness, and then assuming a cheerful tone, "Your mother and sister wanted to persuade me," said she, "that I should never find my way to you—but I insisted upon it that I could. Had I not the instinct of a true friend to guide me?—So now let me sit down and rest myself on this pretty seat—a very comfortable throne!—and that is saying much for a throne. So these are your territories?" continued she, looking round, and talking with an air of playfulness, to give Caroline time to recover herself.

"Why did you never invite me to your garden?—Perhaps, you think me a mere fireside, arm-chair old woman, dead to all the beauties of nature; but I can assure you that I have, all my life, from principle, cultivated this taste, which I think peculiarly suited to women, salutary not only to their health, but to their happiness and their virtues—their domestic

virtues, increasing the interest they take in their homes, heightening those feelings of associated pleasure which extend from persons to places, and which are at once a proof of the strength of early attachments and a security for their continuance to the latest period of life. Our friend, Count Altenberg, was observing to me the other day that we Englishwomen, among our other advantages, from our modes of life, from our spending so many months of the year in the country, have more opportunity of forming and indulging these tastes than is usual among foreign ladies in the same rank of life. Fortunately for us, we are not like Mr Clay's French countess or duchess, who declared that she hated innocent pleasures."

After mentioning French Clay, Mrs Hungerford passed to a comparison between him and Count Altenberg. She had met Mr Clay in town, and disliked him. "He is an Englishman only by birth, and a Frenchman only by affectation; Count Altenberg, on the contrary, a foreigner by birth, has all the tastes and principles that make him worthy to be an Englishman. I am convinced that, if he had liberty of choice, he would prefer residing in England to living in any country in the world. Indeed, he expressed that sentiment at parting from us yesterday."

"He is gone then," said Caroline.

"He is, my love."

Caroline wished to ask where? and whether he was gone for ever? Yet she continued silent—and became extremely pale.

Mrs Hungerford, without appearing to take any notice of her emotion, continued, and answered all the questions which she wished to ask.

"He is gone back to Germany to his own court—recalled, as he told me, by some imperious duty."

Caroline revived.

"So far you see, my dear, we were right, as those usually are who judge from general principles. It was not, indeed, to be credited," continued Mrs Hungerford, "that a man of his character and understanding should act merely from caprice. What the nature of the duty may be, whether relating to his duty as a public or a private man, he did not explain—the latter, I fear! I apprehend some engagement, that will prevent his return to England. In this case he has done most honourably, at whatever risk or pain to himself, to avoid any attempt to engage your affections, my dear; and you have, in these trying circumstances, acted as becomes your sex and yourself."

"I hope so," said Caroline timidly: "my mother and Rosamond endeavoured to reassure me on one point—you have seen more since, and must therefore be better able to judge—Count Altenberg has none of that presumption of manner which puts a woman upon her guard against his *inferences*. But, in secret, do you think he ever suspected——"

"I cannot, my love, tell what passes in the secret recesses of man's heart—much more difficult to penetrate than woman's," replied Mrs Hungerford, smiling. "But let this satisfy you—by no word, hint, or look, could I ever guess that he had formed such a hope. Of your whole family he spoke in terms of the highest regard. Of you he dared not trust himself to say much; but the little he did venture to say was expressive of the highest respect and esteem; more he did not, and ought not, I am convinced, to have allowed himself."

"I am satisfied—quite satisfied," said Caroline, relieving her heart by a deep sigh; "and I thank you, my kind Mrs Hungerford. You have put this subject at rest for ever in my mind. If Count Altenberg *can*

love me with honour, he will; if he cannot, Heaven forbid I should wish it!"

From this time forward Caroline never spoke more upon the subject, never mentioned the name of Count Altenberg. She exerted all the strong command she possessed over herself to conquer the languor and indolence to which she had found herself disposed.

It is a difficult task to restore what may be called the tone of the mind, to recover the power of being acted upon by common and everyday motives, after sensibility has been unusually excited. Where the affections have been deeply and long engaged, this is a task which the most severe philosophy cannot accomplish without the aid of time—and of that superior power which it would be irreverent here to name.

By using no concealment with her friends, by permitting no self-delusion, by having the courage to confess the first symptom of partiality of which she was conscious, Caroline put it out of her own power to nourish a preference into a passion which must ultimately have made herself and her friends unhappy. Beside the advantages which she derived from her literary tastes, and her habits of varying her occupations, she at this time found great resources in her warm and affectionate attachment to her own family.

She had never yet arrived at that state of *egoism*, which marks the height of passion, when all interests and affections sink and vanish before one exclusive and tyrant sentiment.

Chapter xxx.

WHEN Count Altenberg went to London to obtain his passports, he went to pay his parting respects to Lord Oldborough, whose talents and uncommon character had made an indelible impression on his mind.

When he asked whether his lordship had any commands that he could execute at his own court, he was surprised by receiving at once a commission of a difficult and delicate nature. Lord Oldborough, whose penetration had seen into Count Altenberg's character, and who knew how and when to trust, though he was supposed to be the most reserved of men, confided to the count his dissatisfaction with the proceedings of Cunningham Falconer; his suspicions that the envoy was playing double, and endeavouring to ingratiate himself abroad and at home with a party inimical to his lordship's interests.

"Diplomatists are all, more or less, insincere," said Lord Oldborough. "But to have chosen an envoy who joins ingratitude to duplicity would reflect no credit upon the minister by whom he was appointed. Were I speaking to a common person, I should not admit the possibility of my having committed such an error. But Count Altenberg will judge by the whole, and not by a part. He knows that every man *in power* is sometimes the slave of circumstances. This Cunningham Falconer—all these Falconers were forced upon me—how, it is of little consequence to you to hear. It is sufficient for me to assure you, count, that it was not my judgment that erred. Now the necessity has ceased. By other means my purpose has been accomplished. The Falconers are useless to me. But I will not abandon those whom I have undertaken to protect, till I have proof of their perfidy."

Lord Oldborough then explained the points on which he desired to inform himself before he should decide with regard to Cunningham. Count Altenberg undertook to procure for his lordship the means of ascertaining the fidelity of his envoy; and Lord Oldborough then turned the conversation on general politics. He soon perceived that the count was not as much interested in these subjects as formerly. At parting, Lord Oldborough smiled, and said, "You have been, since I saw you last, Count Altenberg, too much in the company of a philosopher, who prefers the happiness of a country gentleman's life to the glory of a statesman's career. But height will soon recall high thoughts. Ambition is not dead, only dormant within you. It will, I hope and trust, make you in time the minister and pride of your country. In this hope I bid you farewell."

Commissioner Falconer having been told by one of the people in the antechamber that Count Altenberg had arrived, and was now with the minister, waited anxiously to see him, caught him in his way out, and eagerly pressed an invitation from Mrs Falconer to dine or spend the evening with them—but the count had now his passports, and pleaded the absolute necessity for his immediately setting out on his return to his own country. The commissioner, from a word or two that he hazarded upon the subject, had the vexation to perceive that his hopes of engaging Count Altenberg to assist the views of his son Cunningham were vain, and he regretted that he had wasted so much civility upon a foreigner who would make him no return.

Miss Georgiana Falconer's mortification at the count's leaving England was much alleviated by finding that he had not been detained by the charms of Miss Caroline Percy, and she was almost consoled for

losing the prize herself, by seeing that it had not been won by her rival. Mrs Falconer, too, though she had long abandoned all hopes of the count as a son-in-law, yet rejoiced to be spared the humiliation of writing to congratulate Mr and Mrs Percy upon the marriage and splendid establishment of their daughter.

"After all, how ill they have managed," said Mrs Falconer; "the game was in their own hands. Certainly Mrs Percy must be the worst mother in the world, and the daughter, with all her sense, a perfect simpleton, or they might have made up the match when they had the count to themselves at Hungerford Castle."

"I told you long ago, but you would never believe, Mrs Falconer," cried the commissioner, "that Count Altenberg's ruling passion was ambition, and that he was not the least likely to fall in love, as you ladies call it. The old Prince of —— is going fast, and Count Altenberg's father has sent for him, that he may be on the spot to secure his favour with the hereditary prince—I am sure I hope Count Altenberg will not be minister; for, from the few words he said to me just now when I met him, he will not enter into my views with regard to Cunningham."

"No, those political visions of yours, commissioner, seldom end in anything but disappointment," said Mrs Falconer. "I always said it would be so."

Then followed a scene of recrimination, such as was the usual consequence of the failure of any of the plans of this intriguing pair.

"And, Mrs Falconer," concluded the commissioner, "I augur as ill of your present scheme for Georgiana as I did of the last. You will find that all your dinners and concerts will be just as much thrown away upon the two Clays as your balls and plays were upon Count Altenberg. And this is the way, ma'am, you go on,

plunging me deeper and deeper in debt," said the commissioner, walking about the room much disturbed. "If anything was to go wrong with Lord Oldborough, what would become of us!"

"My dear, that is a very unseasonable apprehension; for Lord Oldborough, as I hear on all sides, is firmer in power now than he ever was—of that, you know, you were but yesterday giving me assurance and proof. His favour, you know, is so high, that all who were leagued against him in that combination he detected were, in consequence of his lordship's letter, instantly dismissed from office: his colleagues are now of his choosing—the Cabinet, I understand, completely his own friends. What more security can you desire?"

"You don't understand me, Mrs Falconer! I am not thinking of the security of Lord Oldborough's power—of that, after all I have seen, I can have no doubt; but I am not so sure of——"

"*The continuance of my own favour*," he was going to say, but it was painful to him to utter the words, and he had a superstitious dread, common to courtiers, of speaking of their decline of favour. Besides, he knew that reproaches for want of address in managing Lord Oldborough's humour would immediately follow from Mrs Falconer, if he gave any hint of this kind; and on his address the commissioner piqued himself, not without reason. Abruptly changing his tone, and taking that air of authority which every now and then he thought fit to assume, he said, "Mrs Falconer, there's one thing I won't allow—I won't allow Georgiana and you to make a fool of young Petcalf."

"By no means, my love; but if he makes a fool of himself, you know?"

"Mrs Falconer, you recollect the transaction about the draught."

"For Zara's dress?"

"Yes, ma'am. The condition you made then in my name with Georgiana I hold her to, and I expect that she be prepared to be Mrs Petcalf within the year."

"I told her so, my dear, and she acquiesces—she submits—she is ready to obey—if nothing better offers."

"*If*—Ay, there it is!—All the time I know you are looking to the Clays; and if they fail, somebody else will start up, whom you will think a better match than Petcalf, and all these people are to be *fêted*, and so you will go on wasting my money and your own time. Petcalf will run restive at last, you will lose him, and I shall have Georgiana left upon my hands after all."

"No danger, my dear. My principle is the most satisfactory and secure imaginable. To have a number of tickets in the wheel—then, if one comes up a blank, still you have a chance of a prize in the next. Only have patience, Mr Falconer."

"Patience! my dear: how can a man have patience, when he has seen the same thing going on for years? And I have said the same thing to you over and over a hundred times, Mrs Falconer."

"A hundred times at least, I grant, and that, perhaps, is enough to try my patience you'll allow, and yet, you see, how reasonable I am. I have only to repeat what is incontrovertible, that when a girl has been brought up, and has lived in a certain line, you must push her in that line, for she will not do in any other. You must be sensible that no mere country gentleman would ever think of Georgiana—we must push her in the line for which she is fit—the fashionable line."

"Push! Bless my soul, ma'am! you have been pushing one or other of those girls ever since they were in their teens, but your pushing signifies nothing. The

men, don't you see, back as fast as the women advance?"

"Coarse!—Too coarse an observation for you, commissioner!" said Mrs Falconer, with admirable temper; "but when men are angry, they will say more than they think."

"Ma'am, I don't say half as much as I think—ever."

"Indeed!—That is a candid confession, for which I owe you credit, at all events."

"It's a foolish game—it's a foolish game—it's a losing game," continued the commissioner; "and you will play it till we are ruined."

"Not a losing game if it be played with temper and spirit. Many throw up the game like cowards, when, if they had but had courage to double the bet, they would have made their fortune."

"Pshaw! Pshaw!" said the commissioner: "can you double your girls' beauty? can you double their fortune?"

"Fashion stands in the place both of beauty and fortune, Mr Falconer; and fashion, my girls, I hope you will allow, enjoy."

"Enjoy! What signifies that? Fashion, you told me, was to win Count Altenberg—has it won him? Are we one bit the better for the expence we were at in all those entertainments?"

"All that, or most of it—at least the popularity ball—must be set down to Lord Oldborough's account; and that is your affair, commissioner."

"And the play, and the play-house, and the dresses! Was Zara's dress my affair? Did I not tell you, you were wasting your time upon that man?"

"No waste, nothing has been wasted, my dear commissioner; believe me, even in point of economy

we could not have laid out money better; for at a trifling expence we have obtained for Georgiana the credit of having refused Count Altenberg. Lady Kew and Lady Trant have spread the report. You know it is not my business to speak—and now the count is gone who can contradict it with any propriety?—The thing is universally believed. Everybody is talking of it, and the consequence is, Georgiana is more in fashion now than ever she was. There's a proposal I had for her this morning," said Mrs Falconer, throwing a letter carelessly before the commissioner.

"A proposal! That is something worth attending to," said the commissioner, putting on his spectacles.

"No, nothing worth our attention," said Mrs Falconer, "only eighteen hundred a year, which, you know, Georgiana could not possibly live upon."

"Better than nothing, surely," said the commissioner; "let me see."

"Not better than Petcalf, not within a thousand a year so good, putting Asia Minor out of the question. So, you know, I could not hesitate an instant."

"But I hope your answer was very civil. People are not aware what dangerous enemies they make on these occasions," said Mr Falconer: "I hope your answer was very polite."

"Oh! the pink of courtesy," said Mrs Falconer. "I lamented that my daughter's fortune was so small as to put it out of her power, &c., and I added a great deal about *merit*, and the *honour done our family*, and so on. But I wonder the man had the assurance to propose for Georgiana, when he had nothing better to say for himself."

"Petcalf, to be sure, if the general dies, is a thousand a year better. I believe you are right there,"

said Mr Falconer; and with an air of calculating consideration, he took up a pen.

"But what are you about, commissioner? going to write on that letter, as if it was waste paper?" said Mrs Falconer, starting up, and taking it hastily from him: "I must have it for Lady Trant, Lady Kew, and some more of our intimate friends, that they may be able to say they have seen the proposal; for mothers and daughters too, in these days, are so apt to boast, that it is quite necessary to have some written document to produce, and there's no going beyond *that*."

"Certainly—quite necessary. And what written documents," said the commissioner, smiling, "have you to produce in the case of Count Altenberg?"

"Oh! that is another affair," said Mrs Falconer, smiling in her turn. "One must not in all cases have recourse to the same expedients. Besides, if we produce our proofs on one occasion, we shall depend upon having our word taken on trust another time; and it would be too much to make a practice of showing gentlemen's letters: it is not what I should always do—certainly not with regard to a man of Count Altenberg's rank and pretensions, who merits to be treated with somewhat more consideration, surely, than a man who hazards such a proposal as this. I merely produce it to show you that Georgiana is in no absolute distress for admirers. And now, my dear, I must trouble you—those public singers are terribly expensive; yet at a concert we must have them, and one cannot have them without coming up to their price—I must trouble you to sign this draught, for our concert last week."

"Now, Mrs Falconer, I have signed it," cried the commissioner, "and it is the last, for a similar purpose, I ever will sign—upon my honour."

"I have invited everybody to a concert here next week," said Mrs Falconer: "what can I do?"

"Do as others do," said the commissioner; "let these musical professors give a concert at your house: then, instead of paying them, you share their profits, and you have the best company at your house into the bargain."

"Such things are done, I know," said Mrs Falconer, "and by people of rank; but Lady Jane Granville would not do it, when she was more distressed for money than we are, and I know many say it is what they would not do."

"It must be done by you, Mrs Falconer, or you must give up having concerts altogether," said the commissioner, leaving the room.

To give up concerts was quite impossible, especially as French Clay was, or pretended to be, passionately fond of music, and it was at her musical parties that he never failed to attend assiduously. The next concert was given by a celebrated performer at Mrs Falconer's house, and she and the singers shared the profit. To such meanness can the slaves of fashion condescend!

At this concert it happened that there was a new and remarkably handsome, graceful, female Italian singer, who was much admired by all the gentlemen present, and particularly by French Clay, who had set up, with little ear, and less taste, for a great judge of music. He was ambitious of appearing as the patron of this young performer. He went about everywhere talking of her in raptures, and making interest for her with all the great people of his acquaintance. Her own voice and her own charms needed not the protection of Mr Clay; from the night she was first produced at Mrs Falconer's, she became at once the height of the fashion. Everybody was eager to

have her at their parties, especially as she had never yet been upon the stage. Admirers crowded round her, and among them were many of rank and fortune: an old earl and a young baronet were of the number. The ardour of competition so much increased the zeal of French Clay, that what was at first only affectation became real enthusiasm. He was resolved to win the lady from all his rivals. He had frequent opportunities of seeing her at Mrs Falconer's, where he appeared always in glory as her patron.

Seraphina, the fair Italian, considering Mrs Falconer as her first patroness, made it a point of gratitude to hold her concerts frequently at her house. Mrs Falconer was proud of the distinction. Fresh éclat was thrown upon her and upon her daughters.

French Clay was always near Miss Georgiana Falconer, or near Seraphina; and he applauded each by turns with all the raptures of an amateur. Mrs Falconer saw that rivalship with the old earl and the young baronet had worked Mr Clay into a passion for Seraphina; but she thought she knew how a passion for a singer must end, and as this did not interfere with her matrimonial designs, it gave her little inquietude. Bets ran high in the fashionable world upon the three candidates. Mrs Falconer had no doubt that the old earl would carry off the prize, as he was extremely rich, and was ready to make any settlement and any establishment. Her prophecy would, probably, have been accomplished, but that French Clay, strongly urged by the immediate danger of losing the lady, and flattered by Seraphina's mother, who, in another style of life, was equal to Mrs Falconer in address and knowledge of the world, was drawn in to offer what alone could balance the charms of the baronet's youth and of the earl's wealth. A week after the offer was made, Seraphina became Mrs French Clay. Upon this marriage

commissioner Falconer hastened immediately to reproach his wife.

"There! Mrs Falconer, I told you it would never do—there is another son-in-law who has escaped you!"

Never did Mrs Falconer's genius appear so great as in circumstances which would have confounded one of inferior resource. It is true, she had been thrown into surprise and consternation by the first news of this marriage; but by an able stroke she had turned defeat to victory. With a calm air of triumph she replied to her husband, "I beg your pardon, Mr Falconer—French Clay was only my ostensible object: I should have been very sorry to have had him for my son-in-law; for, though it is a secret, I know that he is overwhelmed with debt. The son-in-law I really wished for has not escaped me, sir—the elder brother, English Clay—Clay, of Clay Hall, I apprehend, you will allow, is rather a better match for your daughter; and his proposal for Georgiana, his relation, Lady Trant, was last night authorized to make to me in form. And now, commissioner, there is an end of your fears that your daughter should be left, at last, upon your hands; and now, I flatter myself, you will acknowledge that I always knew what I was about—mistress of Clay Hall, and of seven thousand a year—I think that is doing pretty well for a girl who has nothing."

The commissioner was so much delighted, that he willingly permitted his lady to enjoy her triumph over him.

"Now only consider, commissioner," she pursued, "if I had huddled up that match with Petcalf!—Petcalf, I'll answer for it, in case of necessity, that is, in case of any difficulty on the part of Sir Robert Percy, I can turn over to Bell. Poor Petcalf!" added she, with a smile: "I really have a regard for

that everlasting partner, and wish to leave him a chance of being partner for life to one of my daughters. I am sure he has reason to be excessively obliged to me for thinking of him at this moment—I must go to Georgiana and talk about wedding-clothes, laces, jewels, equipages—Mr Clay, of Clay Hall, piques himself upon having everything the best of its kind, and in the highest style.—Happy—happy girl!"

"Happy—happy father, who has got her off his hands!" cried the commissioner.

"'Twas my doing—'twas all my doing!" said Mrs Falconer.

"It was, my dear; and how was it brought about?" said Mr Falconer: "stay one minute from the wedding-clothes, and tell me."

Mrs Falconer returned, and in the pride of successful intrigue explained all—that is, all she chose that her husband should know.

Lady Trant was Mr Clay's near relation, and Mrs Falconer's intimate friend—how she had engaged her ladyship so zealously in her cause was the point which Mrs Falconer did not choose to explain, and into which the commissioner never thought of inquiring. There are moments in which the most selfish may be betrayed into a belief that others act from generous motives; and the very principles which they hold infallible applied to all other cases, they think admit in their own of an exception: so commissioner Falconer, notwithstanding his knowledge of the world, and his knowledge of himself, took it for granted, that, in this instance, Lady Trant acted from the impulse of disinterested friendship. This point happily admitted without question, all the rest Mrs Falconer could satisfactorily explain. Lady Trant being a friend she could trust entirely, Mrs Falconer had opened her mind to her ladyship, and, by her suggestion, Lady Trant had seized the

happy moment when English Clay was enraged against his brother for his strange marriage, and had deplored that Clay Hall, and the fine estate belonging to it, should go to the children of an Italian singer: English Clay took fresh fire at this idea, and swore that, much as he hated the notion of a wife and children, he had a great mind to marry on purpose to punish his brother, and to cut him off, as he deserved, for ever from Clay Hall. Lady Trant commended his spirit, and urged him to put his resolution into execution—English Clay, however, balked a little at this: women nowadays, he said, were so cursed expensive, that scarce any fortune could suffice for a wife, and horses, and all in style; and as to taking a wife, who would not be of a piece with the rest of his establishment, that was what he was not the man to do. Lady Trant answered, that of course he would wish to have a fashionable wife; that was the only thing that was wanting to make Clay Hall complete.

"But then an establishment that was quite correct, and in the first style for a bachelor, would be quite incorrect for a married man, and everything to do over again."

"True; but then to grow into an old bachelor, and to hear everybody saying, or to know that everybody is saying behind your back, 'He will never marry, you know; and all his estate will go to his brother, or the children of Seraphina, the singer.'"

There are some men who might feel tired of having the same idea repeated, and the self-same words reiterated; but English Clay was not of the number: on the contrary, repetition was necessary, in the first place, to give his mind time to take in an idea; and afterwards, reiteration was agreeable, as it impressed him with a sense of conviction without the trouble of thought. After Lady Trant had reiterated a sufficient

time, he assented, and declared what her ladyship observed was d——d true; but after a silence of several minutes, he added, "There's such a cursed deal of danger of being *taken in* by a woman, especially by one of those fashionable girls, who are all in the catch-match line." Lady Trant, who had been well tutored and prepared with replies by Mrs Falconer, answered that as Mr Clay, of Clay Hall, had a fortune that entitled him to ask any woman, so he was, for the same reason, at full liberty to please himself; and though family connexion and fashion would of course be indispensable to him, yet money could be no object to a man of his fortune—he was not like many needy young men, obliged to sell themselves for a wife's fortune, to pay old debts: no, Lady Trant said, she was sure her relation and friend, Mr Clay, of Clay Hall, would never bargain for a wife, and of course, where there was no bargaining there could be no fear of being taken in.

English Clay had never considered the matter in this view before; but now it was pointed out, he confessed it struck him as *very fair—very fair:* and his pride, of which he had a comfortable portion, being now touched, he asserted both his disinterestedness and his right to judge and choose in this business entirely for himself. Who had a right to blame him? his fortune was his own, and he would marry a girl without sixpence, if she struck his fancy. Lady Trant supported him in his humour, and he began to name some of the young ladies of his acquaintance: one would look well in a curricle; another would do the honours of his house handsomely; another danced charmingly, and would be a credit to him in a ball-room; another would make a sweet-tempered nurse when he should have the gout: but Lady Trant found some objection to every one he mentioned, till, at

last, when he had named all he could think of in remainder to his heart, Lady Trant proposed Miss Georgiana.

But she was intended for his brother.

"Oh! no." Lady Trant had very particular reasons for being positive that neither Mrs nor Miss Falconer had ever such an idea, however they might have let it go abroad, perhaps, to conceal their real wishes—Miss Georgiana Falconer had refused so many gentlemen—Count Altenberg, report said, among others; and it was plain to Lady Trant that the young lady could not be easily pleased—that her affections were not to be engaged very readily: yet she had a notion, she owned, that if——But she was not at liberty to say more. She was only convinced that no girl was more admired than Miss Georgiana Falconer, and no woman would do greater credit to the taste of a man of fashion: she had all the requisites Mr Clay had named: she would look well in a curricle; she would do the honours of his house charmingly; she sung and danced divinely; and Lady Trant summed up all by reiterating, that Miss Georgiana Falconer never would have married his brother.

This persuasive flattery, combining with English Clay's anger against his brother, had such effect, that he protested, if it was not for the trouble of the thing, he did not care if he married next week. But the making the proposal, and all that, was an awkward, troublesome business, to which he could not bring himself. Lady Trant kindly offered to take all trouble of this sort off his hands—undertook to speak to Mrs Falconer, if she had his authority for so doing, and engaged that he should be married without any kind of awkwardness or difficulty. In consequence of this assurance, Lady Trant was empowered by Mr Clay to make the proposal, which was received with so much

joy and triumph by Mrs Falconer and by her Georgiana.

But their joy and triumph were not of long duration. In this family, where none of the members of it acted in concert, or well knew what the others were doing —where each had some separate interest, vanity, or vice, to be pursued or indulged, it often happened that one individual counteracted the other, and none were willing to abandon their selfish purpose, whether of interest or pleasure. On the present occasion, by a curious concatenation of circumstances, it happened that Buckhurst Falconer, who had formerly been the spoiled darling of his mother, was the person whose interest immediately crossed hers; and if he pursued his object, it must be at the risk of breaking off his sister Georgiana's marriage with English Clay. It is necessary to go back a few steps to trace the progress of Buckhurst Falconer's history. It is a painful task to recapitulate and follow the gradual deterioration of a disposition such as his; to mark the ruin and degradation of a character which, notwithstanding its faults, had a degree of generosity and openness, with a sense of honour and quick feeling, which early in life promised well; and which, but for parental weakness and mistaken system, might have been matured into everything good and great. After his mother had, by introducing him early to fashionable company, and to a life of idleness and dissipation, disgusted him with the profession of the law, in which, with talents such as his, he might, with application and perseverance, have risen to wealth and eminence—after his father had, by duplicity and tyranny, forced him into that sacred profession for which the young man felt himself unfit, and which his conscience long refused to consider merely as the means of worldly provision—the next step was to send him with a profligate patron, as

chaplain to a regiment, notorious for gambling. The first sacrifice of principle made, his sense of honour, duty, and virtue, once abandoned, his natural sensibility only hastened his perversion. He had a high idea of the clerical character; but his past habits and his present duties were in direct opposition. Indeed, in the situation in which he was placed, and with the society into which he was thrown, it would have required more than a common share of civil courage, and all the steadiness of a veteran in virtue, to have withstood the temptations by which he was surrounded. Even if he had possessed sufficient resolution to change his former habits, and to become a good clergyman, his companions and his patron, instead of respecting, would have shunned him as a censor. Unwilling to give up the pleasures of conviviality, and incapable of sustaining the martyrdom of ridicule, Buckhurst Falconer soon abjured all the principles to which he could not adhere—he soon gloried in the open defiance of everything that he had once held right. Upon all occasions afraid of being supposed to be subject to any restraint as a clergyman, or to be influenced by any of the prejudices of his profession, he strove continually to show his liberality and spirit by daring, both in words and actions, beyond what others dared. He might have been checked and stopped in his career of extravagance by the actual want of money and of credit, had he not unluckily obtained, at this early period, a living, as a reward for saving Bishop Clay from being choked: this preferment, obtained in circumstances so ludicrous, afforded him matter of much temporary amusement and triumph; and confirmed him in the idea his father had long laboured to inculcate, that merit was unnecessary to rising in the world or in the Church. But however he might endeavour to blind himself to the truth, and however general

opinion was shut out from him for a time by those profligate persons with whom he lived, yet he could not help now and then seeing and feeling that he had lost respectability; and in the midst of noisy merriment he was often to himself an object of secret and sad contempt. Soon after he was separated for a time from Colonel Hauton and his companions, by going to take possession of his living, he made an effort to regain his self-complacency—he endeavoured to distinguish himself as an eloquent preacher.—Ashamed of avowing to his associates better motives, by which he was partly actuated, he protested that he preached only for fame and a deanery. His talents were such as soon accomplished half his wish, and ensured him celebrity—he obtained opportunities of preaching in a fashionable chapel in London—he was prodigiously followed—his theatrical manner, perhaps, increased the effect of his eloquence upon a certain class of his auditors; but the more sober and nice-judging part of his congregation objected to this dramatic art and declamatory style, as tending to draw the attention from the doctrine to the preacher, and to obtain admiration from man more than to do honour to God. This, however, might have passed as a matter of speculative opinion or difference of taste; provided the preacher is believed to be in earnest, the style of his preaching is of little comparative consequence. But the moment he is suspected of being insincere, the moment it is found that he does not practise what he preaches, his power over the rational mind ceases; and to moral feeling such a clergyman becomes an object, not only of contempt, but of disgust and abhorrence. Murmurs were soon heard against the private conduct of the celebrated preacher—perhaps envy for his talents and success mingled her voice with the honest expressions of

virtuous indignation. The murmurs grew louder and louder; and Buckhurst Falconer, to avoid having inquiries made and irregularities brought to light, was obliged to yield to a rival preacher of far inferior talents, but of more correct conduct.

Commissioner Falconer was glad that his son was disappointed in this manner, as he thought it would make him more attentive than he had been of late to Colonel Hauton; and the living of Chipping-Friars was better worth looking after than the fleeting fame of a popular preacher. Buckhurst, however, still held fame in higher estimation than it had ever been held by his father, who never valued it but as subordinate to interest. But the love of fame, however superior to mercenary habits, affords no security for the stability of conduct; on the contrary, without good sense and resolution, it infallibly accelerates the degeneracy of character. Buckhurst's hopes of obtaining literary celebrity being lost, he sunk another step, and now contented himself with the kind of notoriety which can be gained by a man of talents, who condescends to be the wit of private circles and of public dinners. Still he met with many competitors in this line. In the metropolis, the mendicants for fame, like the professional beggars, portion out the town among them, and whoever ventures to ply beyond his allotted *walk* is immediately jostled and abused; and the false pretensions of the wit, and all the tricks to obtain admiration, are as sure to be exposed by some rivals of the trade, as the false legs, arms, and various impostures of the beggar are denounced by the brother-beggar, on whose monopoly he has infringed. Our wit was soon compelled to confine himself to his own *set*, and gradually he degenerated from being the wit to being the good story-teller of the company. A man who lives by pleasing

must become whatever the society in which he lives desire. Colonel Hauton and his associates had but little taste for pure wit—low humour and facetious stories were more suited to their capacities — *slang* and buffoonery were their delight. Buckhurst had early become a proficient in all these: the respect due to the clerical character had not restrained him from the exercise of arts for his own amusement, which now he found indispensably requisite for the entertainment of others, and to preserve favour with his patron. Contrary to all calculation, and, as the commissioner said, to all reasonable expectation, the old paralytic incumbent had continued to exist, and so many years had passed since the promise had been made to Buckhurst of this living, the transaction in consequence of which it was promised was now so completely forgotten, that the commissioner feared that Colonel Hauton, no longer under the influence of shame, might consider the promise as merely gratuitous, not binding: therefore the cautious father was solicitous that his son should incessantly stick close to the colonel, who, as it was observed, never recollected his absent friends. Buckhurst, though he knew him to be selfish and silly, yet had no suspicion of his breaking his promise, because he piqued himself on being a man of honour; and little as he cared, in general, for any one but himself, Colonel Hauton had often declared that he could not live without Buckhurst Falconer. He was always driving with the colonel, riding, betting with him, or relieving him from the sense of his own inability by making a jest of some person. Buckhurst's talents for mimickry were an infallible resource. In particular he could mimick the two Clays to perfection, could take off the affected tone, foreign airs, and quick talkative vanity of French Clay; and represent the slow, surly reserve,

supercilious silence, and solemn self-importance of English Clay. He used to imitate not only their manners, gesture, and voice, but could hold conversations in their characters, fall naturally into their train of thinking and their modes of expression. Once a week, at least, the two Clays were introduced for the amusement of their friend Colonel Hauton, who, at the hundredth representation, was as well pleased as at the first, and never failed to "witness his wonder with an idiot laugh," quite unconscious that, the moment afterwards, when he had left the room, this laugh was mimicked for the entertainment of the remainder of the band of friends. It happened one night that Buckhurst Falconer, immediately after Colonel Hauton had quitted the party, began to set the table in a roar, by mimicking his laugh, snuffling voice, and silly observations; when, to his utter confusion, his patron, who he thought had left the room, returned from behind a screen, and resumed his place opposite to Buckhurst. Not Banquo's ghost could have struck more terror into the heart of the guilty. Buckhurst grew pale as death, and sudden silence ensued. Recovering his presence of mind, he thought that it was possible the colonel might be such a fool as not to have recognized himself; so by a wink to one of the company, and a kick under the table to another, he endeavoured to make them join in his attempt to pass off the whole as mimickry of a Colonel *Hallerton*. His companions supported him as he continued the farce, and the laughter recommenced. Colonel Hauton filled his glass, and said nothing; by degrees, however, he joined, or pretended to join, in the laugh, and left the company without Buckhurst's being able exactly to determine whether he had duped him or not. After the colonel was fairly gone—for this time Buckhurst took care not only to look behind the screen, but even

to shut the doors of the antechamber, and to wait till he heard the parting wheels—they held a conference upon the question—duped or not duped? All agreed in flattering Buckhurst that he had completely succeeded in giving *the colonel the change*, and he was particularly complimented on his address by a Mr Sloak, chaplain to a nobleman, who was one of the company. There was something of a hypocritical tone in Sloak's voice—something of a doubtful cast in his eyes, which, for a moment, raised in Buckhurst's mind a suspicion of him. But, the next day, Colonel Hauton appeared as usual; Buckhurst rode, drove, and jested with him as before; and the whole transaction was, on his part, forgotten. A month afterwards the rector of Chipping-Friars actually died—commissioner Falconer despatched an express to Buckhurst, who stood beside his bed, with the news, the instant he opened his eyes in the morning. Buckhurst sent the messenger on to Colonel Hauton's at the barracks, and before Buckhurst was dressed the colonel's groom brought him an invitation to meet a large party at dinner: "the colonel would be unavoidably engaged, by regimental business, all morning."

Buckhurst's friends and acquaintance now flocked to congratulate him, and, by dinner-time, he had in imagination disposed of the second year's tithes, and looked out for a curate to do the duty of Chipping-Friars. The company assembled at dinner, and the colonel seemed in uncommonly good spirits, Buckhurst jovial and triumphant—nothing was said of the living, but everything was taken for granted. In the middle of dinner the colonel cried, "Come, gentlemen, fill your glasses, and drink with me to the health of the new rector of Chipping-Friars." The glasses were filled instantly, all but Buckhurst Falconer's, who, of course, thought he should not drink his own health.

"Mr Sloak, I have the pleasure to drink your health; Mr Sloak, rector of Chipping-Friars," cried the patron, raising his voice. "Buckhurst," added he, with a malicious smile, "you do not fill your glass."

Buckhurst sat aghast. "Colonel, is this a jest?"

"A jest?—by G—! no," said the colonel; "I have had enough of jests and jesters."

"What can this mean?"

"It means," said the colonel coolly, "that idiot as you take me, or make me to be, I'm not fool enough to patronise a mimick to mimick myself; and, moreover, I have the good of the Church too much at heart, to make a *rector* of one who has no rectitude—I can have my pun, too."

The laugh was instantly turned against Buckhurst. Starting from table, he looked alternately at Colonel Hauton and at Mr Sloak, and could scarcely find words to express his rage. "Hypocrisy! Treachery! Ingratitude! Cowardice! If my cloth did not protect you, you would not dare——Oh! that I was not a clergyman!" cried Buckhurst.

"It's a good time to wish it, faith!" said the colonel; "but you should have thought better before you put on the cloth."

Cursing himself, his patron, and his father, Buckhurst struck his forehead, and rushed out of the room: an insulting laugh followed from Colonel Hauton, in which Mr Sloak and all the company joined—Buckhurst heard it with feelings of powerless desperation. He walked as fast as possible—he almost ran through the barrack-yard and through the streets of the town, to get as far as he could from this scene—from these people. He found himself in the open fields, and leaning against a tree—his heart almost bursting—for still he had a heart: "Oh! Mr Percy!" he exclaimed aloud, "once I had a friend—a good, generous

friend—and I left him for such a wretch as this! Oh! if I had followed his advice! He knew me—knew my better self! And if he could see me at this moment, he would pity me. Oh! Caroline! you would pity—no, you would despise me, as I despise myself——I a clergyman!——Oh! father! father! what have you to answer for!"

To this sudden pang of conscience and feeling succeeded the idea of the reproaches which his father would pour upon him—the recollection of his debts, and the impossibility of paying them—his destitute, hopeless condition—anger against the new rector of Chipping-Friars, and against his cold, malicious patron, returned with increased force upon his mind. The remainder of that day, and the whole of the night, were passed in these fluctuations of passion. Whenever he closed his eyes and began to doze, he heard the voice of Colonel Hauton drinking the health of Mr Sloak; and twice he started from his sleep, after having collared both the rector and his patron. The day brought him no relief: the moment his creditors heard the facts, he knew he should be in immediate danger of arrest. He hurried to town to his father—his father must know his situation sooner or later, and something must be done.

We spare the reader a shocking scene of filial and parental reproaches.

They were both, at last, compelled to return to the question, What is to be done? The father declared his utter inability to pay his son's debts, and told him, that now there remained but one way of extricating himself from his difficulties—to turn to a better patron.

"Oh! sir, I have done with patrons," cried Buckhurst.

"What, then, will you do, sir? Live in a jail the remainder of your life?"

Buckhurst gave a deep sigh, and, after a pause, said, "Well, sir—go on—Who is to be my new patron?"

"Your old friend, Bishop Clay."

"I have no claim upon him. He has done much for me already."

"Therefore he will do more."

"Not pay my debts—and that is the pressing difficulty. He cannot extricate me, unless he could give me a good living immediately, and he has none better than the one I have already, except Dr Leicester's—his deanery, you know, is in the gift of the crown. Besides, the good dean is likely to live as long as I shall."

"Stay; you do not yet, quick sir, see my scheme—a scheme which would pay your debts and put you at ease at once—Miss Tammy Clay, the bishop's sister."

"An old, ugly, cross, avaricious devil!" cried Buckhurst.

"Rich! passing rich! and well inclined toward you, Buckhurst, as you know."

Buckhurst said that she was his abhorrence—that the idea of a man's selling himself in marriage was so repugnant to his feelings, that he would rather die in a jail.

His father let him exhaust himself in declamation, certain that he would be brought to think of it at last, by the necessity to which he was reduced. The result was, what the commissioner saw it must be—Creditors pressed—a jail in immediate view—no resource but Miss Tammy Clay. He went down to the country to the bishop's, to get out of the way of his creditors, and—to consider about it. He found no difficulty likely to arise on the part of the lady. The bishop old, and almost doting, governed by his sister Tammy, who was an admirable housekeeper, and kept

his table exquisitely, was brought, though very reluctantly, to consent to their marriage.

Not so acquiescent, however, were Miss Tammy's two nephews, French and English Clay. They had looked upon her wealth as their indefeasible right and property. The possibility of her marrying had for years been, as they thought, out of the question; and of all the young men of their acquaintance, Buckhurst Falconer was the very last whom they would have suspected to have any design upon aunt Tammy—she had long and often been the subject of his ridicule. French Clay, though he had just made an imprudent match with a singer, was the more loud and violent against the aunt; and English Clay, though he was not in want of her money, was roused by the idea of being duped by the Falconers. This was just at the time he had commissioned Lady Trant to propose for Miss Georgiana. Aunt Tammy had promised to give him six thousand pounds whenever he should marry: he did not value her money a single sixpence, but he would not be tricked out of his rights by any man or woman breathing. Aunt Tammy, resenting certain words that had escaped him derogatory to her youth and beauty, and being naturally unwilling to give—anything but herself—refused to part with the six thousand pounds. In these hard times, and when she was going to marry an expensive husband, she laughing said, that all she had would be little enough for her own establishment. Buckhurst would willingly have given up the sum in question, but English Clay would not receive it as a consequence of his intercession. His pride offended Buckhurst: they came to high words, and high silence. English Clay went to his relation, Lady Trant, and first reproaching her with having been too precipitate in executing his first commission, gave her a second, in which he begged she would make no

delay: he requested her ladyship would inform Mrs Falconer that a double alliance with her family was more than he had looked for—and in one word, that either her son Buckhurst's marriage with his aunt Tammy, or his own marriage with Miss Georgiana, must be given up. He would not have his aunt at her age make herself ridiculous, and he would not connect himself with a family who could uphold a young man in duping an old woman: Lady Trant might shape his message as she pleased, but this was to be its substance.

In consequence of Lady Trant's intimation, which of course was made with all possible delicacy, Georgiana and Mrs Falconer wrote to Buckhurst in the strongest terms, urging him to give up his intended marriage. There were, as they forcibly represented, so many other old women with large fortunes who could in the course of a short time be found, who would be quite as good matches for him, that it would argue a total insensibility to the interests and entreaties of his beloved mother and sister, if he persisted in his present preposterous design. Buckhurst answered—

"My dear Mother and Georgy,

"I was married yesterday, and am as sorry for it to-day as you can be.

"Yours truly,

"B. F.

"P.S.—There are other young men, with as good fortunes as English Clay, in the world."

The letter and the postscript disappointed and enraged Mrs Falconer and Georgiana beyond description.

English Clay left his D. I. O. at Mrs Falconer's door, and *banged* down to Clay Hall.

Georgiana, violent in the expression of her disappointment, would have exposed herself to Lady Trant, and to half her acquaintance; but Mrs Falconer, in the midst of her mortification, retained command of temper sufficient to take thought for the future. She warned Lady Trant to be silent, and took precautions to prevent the affair from being known; providently determining that, as soon as her daughter should recover from the disappointment of losing Clay Hall, she would marry her to Petcalf, and settle her at once at the Lodge in Asia Minor.

"Till Georgiana is married," said she to herself, "the commissioner will never let me have peace: if English Clay's breaking off the match gets wind, we are undone; for who will think of a rejected girl, beautiful or fashionable though she be? So the best thing that can be done is to marry her immediately to Petcalf. I will have it so—and the wedding-clothes will not have been bought in vain."

The bringing down the young lady's imagination, however, from Clay Hall to a lodge was a task of much difficulty; and Mrs Falconer often in the bitterness of her heart exclaimed, that she had the most ungrateful children in the world. It seems that it is a tacit compact between mothers and daughters of a certain class, that if the young ladies are dressed, amused, advertised, and exhibited at every fashionable public place and private party, their hearts, or hands at least, are to be absolutely at the disposal of their parents.

It was just when Mrs Falconer was exasperated by Georgiana's ingratitude that her son Buckhurst was obliged to come to London after his marriage, to settle with his creditors. His bride insisted upon accompanying him, and chose this unpropitious time for being

introduced to his family. And such a bride! Mrs Buckhurst Falconer! Such an introduction! Such a reception! His mother cold and civil, merely from policy to prevent their family quarrels from becoming public; his sisters——

But enough. Here let us turn from the painful scene, and leave this house divided against itself.

Chapter xxxi.

LETTER FROM ALFRED TO HIS FATHER.

"MY DEAR FATHER,—I send you two pamphlets on the causes of the late changes in the ministry, one by a friend, the other by an enemy, of Lord Oldborough. Temple I should have thought the author of the first, but that I know he has not time to write, and that there does not appear any of that *behind the scene knowledge* which his situation affords. All the pamphleteers and newspaper politicians write as if they knew the whole—some confident that the ministry split on one question—some on another; long declamations and abuse follow as usual on each side, but WISE people, and of course myself among that number, suspect 'that all that we know is, that we know nothing.' That there was some private intrigue in the Cabinet, which has not yet transpired, I opine from Temple's reserve whenever I have mentioned the subject. This morning, when I asked him to frank these pamphlets, he laughed, and said that I was sending coals to Newcastle: what this meant he refused to explain, or rather he attempted to explain it away by observing that people of good understanding often could judge better at a distance of what was passing in the political world than those who were close to the scene of action, and subject

to hear the contradictory reports of the day; therefore, he conceived that I might be sending materials for thinking to one who could judge better than I can. I tormented Temple for a quarter of an hour with a cross-examination so able, that it was really a pity to waste it out of the courts; but I could get nothing more from him. Is it possible, my dear father, that you are at the bottom of all this?

"Lord Oldborough certainly told me the other day, and in a very significant manner, and, as I now recollect, fixing his inquiring eye upon me, as he said the words, that he not only felt esteem and regard for Mr Percy, but *gratitude*—gratitude for tried friendship. I took it at the time as a general expression of kindness; now I recollect the look, and the pause after the word gratitude, I put this with Temple's coals to Newcastle. But, if it is a secret, I must not inquire, and if it is not, you will tell it to me. So I shall go on to my own affairs.

"The other day I was surprised by a visit at my chambers from an East India director. Lord Oldborough, I find, recommended it to him to employ me in a very important cause, long pending, for a vast sum of money: the whole, with all its accumulated and accumulating interest, depending on a point of law. Heaven send me special sense, or special nonsense, sufficient to avoid a nonsuit, of which there have been already no less than three in this cause.

"What do you think of Lord Oldborough's kindness? This is only one of many instances in which I have traced his desire to serve me. It is not common with politicians thus to recollect those who have no means of serving them, and who have never reminded them even of their existence by paying court in any way actively or passively.

"The Falconers are all discontented with his lord-

ship at this moment, because he has disposed of a sinecure place on which the commissioner had long had his eye. His lordship has given it to an old disabled sea-captain, whom he knew only by reputation.

"The accounts you have heard of Buckhurst's marriage are, alas! too true; and what you have been told of the lady's age and ugliness is not exaggerated. As to her temper, and her avarice, I am afraid that what you have heard of them is also true; for a brother lawyer of mine, who was employed to draw the settlements, says she has taken care to keep every penny she could in her own power; and that in the whole course of his practice he never saw so hard a battle between love and parsimony. Poor Buckhurst! who could have foreseen that this would be his fate! I met him in the street yesterday with his bride, and he looked as if he would rather be hanged than receive my congratulations; I passed without seeming to have seen them.

"I have just received Mr Barclay's letter, and am going to work upon his settlements. So Caroline's wishes for Lady Mary Pembroke will be accomplished. I asked Temple whether Lord Oldborough had heard anything of Count Altenberg since his return to his own country. Yes—one *private* letter to Lord Oldborough, from which nothing had transpired but one line of general thanks for civilities received in England. Temple, who seems to have formed the same notion and the same wishes that we had, told me yesterday, without my questioning him, that Lord Oldborough had written with his own hand an answer to the count, which none of the secretaries have seen. Temple, in sealing up the packet, ventured to ask, whether there was any chance of seeing Count Altenberg again in England. 'None that he knew,' Lord Oldborough answered. Temple, who of all men is least like com-

missioner Falconer in circumlocutory address, at once blurted out, 'Is Count Altenberg going to be married?' Lord Oldborough turned and looked upon him in surprise—whether surprise at his curiosity, or at the improbability of the count's making his lordship the confidant of his love affairs, Temple declares he was in too much confusion to be able to decide. Lord Oldborough made no reply, but took up an answer to a memorial, which he had ordered Temple to draw, pointed out some unlucky mistakes in it, and finished by saying to him, 'Mr Temple, your thoughts are not in your business. *Sir, I do believe you are in love;*' which sentence his lordship pronounced with a look and accent that would have suited, *Sir, I do believe you have the plague.* 'And if so, do me the justice to let me employ Mr Shaw to do your business, till you are married.'

"Temple says that Lord Oldborough is proud of showing himself a foe to love, which he considers as the bane of ambition, and as one of the weaknesses of human nature, to which a great man ought to be superior.

"Whether the secretary be right or wrong in this opinion of his lordship, I have not seen enough to be able to determine; and I suspect that Temple is not at present a perfectly calm observer. Ever since his visit to the country he seems not to be entirely master of himself: his heart is still hovering round about some absent object—what object, I do not know; for though he does not deny my charge, he will not tell me the name of his fair one. I suspect Lady Frances Arlington of having stolen his heart. I am very sorry for it—for I am clear she is only coquetting with him. Temple says that he is too poor to marry. He is so amiable, that I am sure he will make any woman he marries happy, if it be not her own fault, and if they have but

enough to live upon. It grieves me to hear his unavailing daily regrets for having quitted the bar. Had he continued in his original profession, he might, and in all probability would have been, at this moment (as his competitor, a man much his inferior in talent, actually is), in the receipt of four thousand good pounds per annum, independent of all men; and might have married any woman in any rank. Beside, even with such a patron as Lord Oldborough, Temple feels dependence grievous to his spirit. He is of a very good family, and was not early used to a subservient situation. His health too will be hurt by his close confinement to the business of office—and he has no time for indulging his literary tastes—no play for his genius: that was his original grievance at the bar, but his present occupations are less congenial to his taste than law ever was. His brother-secretary, Mr Shaw, is a mere matter-of-fact man, who is particularly unsuited to him—an objector to everything new, a curtailer and contemner of all eloquence; poor Temple is uneasy and discontented; he would give up his situation to-morrow, but that he cannot quit Lord Oldborough. He says that he has a hundred times resolved to resign—that he has had his letter written, and the words on his lips; but he never could, when it came to the point, present the letter or pronounce the farewell to Lord Oldborough. Wonderful the ascendency this man has over the mind!—Extraordinary his power of attaching, with manners so little conciliatory! Adieu, my dear father; I have indulged myself too long in writing to you. I have to read over the late Mr Panton's will, and to give our friend Mr Gresham an opinion upon it—notwithstanding Rosamond's cruelty to him, he is as much our friend, and her friend, as ever. Panton's will is on ten skins of parchment: and then I have a plea in rejoinder

to draw for Lady Jane Granville; and, worse than all, to read and answer four of her ladyship's notes now on my table. By-the-bye, I would rather carry on a suit for any four men than for one such woman of business as poor Lady Jane. She is never at rest one moment; never can believe that either lawyer or solicitor knows what he is about—always thinks her letters and notes can do more than bills in Chancery, or than the Lord Chancellor himself. She frets incessantly. I must request Erasmus to medicine her to repose; she has absolutely a *law fever*. Erasmus is at Richmond—sent for by some *grandee:* he is in high practice. He told me he began last week to write to Rosamond, from the bedside of some sleeping patient, a full and true answer to all her questions about Miss Panton; but the sleeper awakened, and the doctor had never time to finish his story.

"Adieu a second time. Love to all.

"Dear father, yours affectionately,

"ALFRED PERCY.

"Just as I began the second skin of Panton's will, a note was brought to me from——whom do you think? Lord Oldborough, requesting to see me at four o'clock. What can his lordship want with me? —I must send this frank before I can satisfy my own curiosity on this point—or yours, Rosamond."

After finishing the perusal of Mr Panton's long-winded will, writing an opinion upon it for Mr Gresham, and penning a quieting note for poor Lady Jane Granville, Alfred, eager to be punctual to the appointed hour, went to the minister. He need not have looked at his watch so often, or have walked so fast, for when he arrived it wanted five minutes of the time appointed, and his lordship had not returned

from a visit to the Duke of Greenwich. He was told, however, that orders had been given for his admittance; and he was shown into an apartment, where he had leisure, during a full quarter of an hour, to admire his own punctuality. At last he heard a noise of loud huzzas in the street, and looking out of the window, he saw a crowd at the farthest end of the street: and as it moved nearer, perceived that the populace had taken the horses from Lord Oldborough's carriage, and were drawing him to his own door, with loud acclamations. His lordship bowed to the multitude as he got out of his carriage rather proudly and coldly, yet still the crowd threw up their hats and huzzaed. He apologized to Alfred, as he entered the room, for having been later than his appointment. Commissioner Falconer and Mr Temple were with him, and the commissioner immediately began to tell how they had been delayed by the zeal of the people. Lord Oldborough took a paper from his pocket, and walked to the window to read it, without seeming to hear one word that the commissioner was saying, and without paying any attention to the acclamations of the multitude below, which were again repeated on their seeing him at the window. When his lordship had finished looking over the paper, he called upon Alfred to witness it, and then presenting it to Mr Falconer, he said, in his haughtiest manner, "An equivalent, sir, for that sinecure place which you asked for, and which it was out of my power to obtain for you. *That* was given as the just reward of merit, and of public services. My private *debts*——" [Alfred Percy observed that his lordship did not use the word *obligation*.] "My private debts to your family, Mr Falconer, could not be paid from the public fund with which I am intrusted, but you will not, I hope, find me the less desirous that they should be properly

acknowledged. The annuity," continued he, putting his finger on the amount, which the commissioner longed to see, but at which he had not dared yet to look, "the annuity is to the full amount of that place which, I think you assured me, would satisfy your and Mrs Falconer's expectations."

"Oh! my lord, more than satisfy: but from your lordship's private fortune—from your lordship's own emoluments of office, I cannot possibly think—— Mrs Falconer would, I am sure, be excessively distressed——"

"Do me the favour, sir, to let no more be said upon this subject," interrupted Lord Oldborough. "As you return home, will you speak to those poor people whom I still hear in the street, and advise them now to return peaceably to their homes. My man Rodney, I am afraid, has thought it for my honour to be too liberal to these good people—but you will speak to them, commissioner."

The commissioner, who never completely felt Lord Oldborough's character, imagined that at this moment his lordship secretly enjoyed the clamour of popular applause, and that this cold indifference was affected; Mr Falconer therefore protested, with a smile, that he would do his best to calm the enthusiasm of the people, but that it was a hard, if not impossible task, to stem the tide of Lord Oldborough's popularity. "Enjoy it, my lord!" concluded Mr Falconer; "Enjoy it!—No minister in my memory ever was so popular!"

As soon as the commissioner, after saying these words, had left the room, Lord Oldborough, in a tone of sovereign contempt, repeated the word, "Popularity! There goes a man, now, who thinks me fit to be a fool to fame!"

"Popularity," said Mr Temple, "is a bad master,

but a good servant. 'A great man will,' as Burke says, 'disdain to veer like the weathercock on the temple of fashion with every breath of wind.' But may he not, my lord—say, for you know—may he not wisely take advantage of the gale, and direct this great *power*, so as to work the state machinery to good purpose?"

"A dangerous power," replied Lord Oldborough, turning from his secretary to Alfred, as if he was impatient to speak of business. Temple, who had more of the habits of a man of letters than of a man of business or of a courtier, was apt unseasonably to pursue a discussion, and to pique himself upon showing sincerity by declaring a difference of opinion from his patron. Utterly repugnant as this was to the minister's habits and temper, yet in admiration of the boldness of the man, and in consideration for his true attachment, Lord Oldborough bore it with magnanimous patience—when he had time—and when he had not, would cut it short at once.

"In a mixed government, popularity, philosophically speaking, if I may differ from your lordship ——" Temple began.

"Permit me, sir, first," interrupted Lord Oldborough, "to settle my business with Mr Alfred Percy, who, being a professional man, and in high practice, probably sets a just value upon his time."

Mr Temple, who was a man of quick feelings, felt a word or glance of reproof from Lord Oldborough with keen sensibility. Alfred could not fix his own attention upon what his lordship was now beginning to say. Lord Oldborough saw reflected in Alfred's countenance the disturbance in his friend's: and immediately returning, and putting a key into Mr Temple's hand—"You will do me a service, sir," said he, "by looking over my father's papers marked *private* in red

letters. They may be necessary in this business—they are papers which I could trust only to one who has my interests at heart."

Mr Temple's face brightened instantly, and bowing much lower than usual, he received the key with great respect, and hurried away to search for the papers.

"For a similar reason, Mr Alfred Percy," said Lord Oldborough, "they shall, if you please, be put into your hands." His lordship moved a chair towards Alfred, and seated himself. "My law-agent has not satisfied me of late. A suit, into which I have been plunged by those who had the direction of my business, has not been carried on with ability or vigour. I had not leisure to look into any affairs that merely concerned myself. Circumstances have just wakened me to the subject, and to the perception that my private fortune has suffered, and will suffer yet more materially, unless I am fortunate enough to find united in the same person a lawyer and a friend. I have looked round, and see many older barristers than Mr Alfred Percy, but none so likely to be interested in my affairs as the son of my earliest friend, and few more capable of conducting them with diligence and ability. May I hope, sir, for hereditary kindness from you, as well as for professional services?"

No one knew better than Lord Oldborough how to seem receiving whilst he conferred a favour; and if ever he appeared harsh, it was only where he knew that the people to whom he spoke had not feelings worthy of his consideration. His lordship was as much pleased by the manner in which this trust was accepted as our young lawyer could be by the manner in which it was offered.

"My papers then shall be sent to you directly," said Lord Oldborough. "Look over them, and if you are of opinion that my case is a bad one, I will stop

where I am. If, on the contrary, you find that justice and law are on my side, proceed, persist. I shall trust the whole to you, sir, without a farther question."

Lord Oldborough next spoke of a steward of his at Clermont Park, who, as he had reason to suspect, was leagued with a certain attorney Sharpe in fraudulent designs: his lordship hoped that Mr Alfred Percy, during his vacations, when spent in that neighbourhood, might, consistently with his professional duties, find time to see into these affairs; and, in his lordship's absence, might supply the want of the master's eye.

Alfred assured his lordship that no effort or care should be wanting on his part to justify the high confidence with which he was honoured.

"Since you are going to take charge of my business, sir," pursued Lord Oldborough, "it is fit you should know my views relative to my affairs. In my present situation, with the favour I enjoy, and the opportunities I command, it would be easy to make my fortune whatever I pleased. Avarice is not my passion. It is my pride not to increase the burdens of my country. Mine is a generous country, ever ready to reward her public servants, living or dying. But, whilst I live, never will I speculate upon her generosity, and, when I die, never shall my heirs appeal to her compassion. My power at its zenith, and my character being known, I can afford to lay aside much of that adventitious splendour which adds nothing to true dignity. Economy and dignity are compatible—essential to each other. To preserve independence, and, consequently, integrity, economy is necessary in all stations. Therefore, sir, I determine—for I am not stringing sentences together that are to end in nothing—I determine, at this moment, to begin to make retrenchments in my expenditure. The establishment at Clermont Park,

whither I have no thoughts of returning, may be reduced. I commit that, sir, to your discretion."

Mr Temple returned with the papers, on which Lord Oldborough put his seal, and said his solicitor should deliver them, with all others that were necessary, the next morning to Mr Percy. Alfred, careful never to intrude a moment on the time of the minister, rose, and, without repeating his thanks, made his bow.

"I consider this lawsuit as a fortunate circumstance," said Lord Oldborough, "since it affords me means at last of engaging Mr Alfred Percy in my service, in a mode which cannot," added his lordship, smiling, "interfere with his family horror of ministerial patronage."

Alfred said something respectfully expressive of his sense of the professional advantage he must derive from being employed by Lord Oldborough—a species of patronage, by which he felt himself most highly honoured, and for which he was sure his whole family would feel properly grateful.

"Sir," said Lord Oldborough, following him to the door, "if I had ever doubted it, you would convince me that perfect propriety of manner is consistent with independence of mind. As to the rest, we all know the difference between a client and a patron."

The management of Lord Oldborough's business necessarily led to an increase of intercourse between his lordship and Alfred, which was peculiarly agreeable to our young barrister, not only as it gave him opportunities of seeing more of the character of this minister, but as it put it into his power to be of service occasionally to his friend Mr Temple. Chained to a desk, his genius confined to the forms of office, and with a master too high, and an associate too low, to afford him any of the pleasures of society, he had languished for want of a companion. Alfred encour-

aged him by example to submit to the drudgery of business, showed him that a man of letters may become a man of business, and that the habits of both may be rendered compatible. Temple now performed the duties of his office with all that regularity which is supposed to be peculiar to dulness. About this time he had been brought into Parliament by Lord Oldborough, and in the intervals of business, in that leisure which order afforded him, he employed and concentrated his powers on a political question of considerable importance; and when he was completely master of the subject, he rose in the House of Commons, and made a speech, which, from all parties, obtained deserved applause. The speech was published. A few days afterwards, Mr Temple happened to enter Lord Oldborough's cabinet earlier than usual: he found his lordship reading; and reading with so much attention, that he did not observe him —he heard his lordship's quick and decided pencil mark page after page. At length, rising and turning to throw the book on the table, Lord Oldborough saw his secretary copying a letter.

"An excellent speech—to the purpose, sir," said Lord Oldborough. "It had its effect on the House, I understand; and I thank your friend, Mr Alfred Percy, for putting it into my hands when I had leisure to peruse it with attention."

Lord Oldborough thought for some moments, then looked over some official papers which he had ordered Mr Temple to draw up.

"Very well, sir—very well. A man of genius, I see, can become a man of business."

His lordship signed the papers, and, when that was finished, turned again to Mr Temple.

"Sir, some time ago a place was vacant, which, I know, you had reason to expect. It was given to Mr

Shaw, because it was better suited to him than to you. The manner in which you took your disappointment showed a confidence in my justice. Have you any objection, Mr Temple, to the diplomatic line?"

"I fear—or I should say, I hope—my lord, that I have not the habits of dissimulation, which, as I have always understood, are necessary to success in the diplomatic line."

"You have understood wrongly, sir," replied Lord Oldborough. "I, who have seen something of courts, and know something of diplomacy, am of opinion that a man of sense, who knows what he is about, who says the thing that is, who will tell at once what he can do, and what he cannot, would succeed better as a negotiator in the present state of Europe, than could any diplomatist with all the simulation and dissimulation of Chesterfield, or with the tact of Mazarin."

"Indeed, my lord!" said Mr Temple, looking up with an air of surprise that almost expressed, then why did you choose Cunningham Falconer for an envoy?

"Pray," said Lord Oldborough, taking a long inspiration with a pinch of snuff, "pray with that despatch this morning from Mr Cunningham Falconer were there any private letters?"

"One for commissioner Falconer, my lord."

"None from Count Altenberg to me?"

"None, my lord."

The minister took a walk up and down the room, and then returning to Mr Temple, said, "His Majesty thinks proper, sir, to appoint you envoy in the place of Mr Cunningham Falconer, who is recalled."

"I thank you, my lord—his Majesty does me great honour," cried Mr Temple, with sudden gratitude: then, his countenance and tone instantly changing from joy to sorrow, he added, "His Majesty does me great honour, my lord, but——"

"But not great pleasure, it seems, sir," said Lord Oldborough. "I thought, Mr Temple, you had trusted to me the advancement of your fortune."

"My fortune! My lord, I am struck with surprise and gratitude by your lordship's goodness in taking thought for the advancement of my fortune. But I have other feelings."

"And may I ask what is the nature of your other feelings, sir?"

"My lord—excuse me—I cannot tell them to you."

"One word more, sir. Do you hesitate from any motives of delicacy, with respect to the present envoy?"

"No, my lord, you look too high for my motive; and the higher I am sensible that I stand in your lordship's opinion, the greater is my fear of falling. I beg you will excuse me: the offer that your lordship has had the goodness to make would be the height of my ambition; but when opposing motives draw the will in contrary directions——"

"Sir, if you are going into the bottomless pit of metaphysics, excuse me," said Lord Oldborough—"there I must leave you. I protest, sir, you are past my comprehension."

"And past my own," cried Mr Temple, "for," with effort he uttered the words, "unfortunately I have formed an—I have become attached to——"

"In short, sir, you are *in love*, I think," said Lord Oldborough coolly. "I think I told you so, sir, more than a month ago."

"I have said it! and said it to Lord Oldborough!" exclaimed Mr Temple, looking as one uncertain whether he were dreaming or awake.

"It is undoubtedly uncommon to select a minister of state for the confidant of a love affair," said Lord Oldborough, with an air of some repressed humour.

"I knew I should expose myself to your lordship's derision," exclaimed Mr Temple.

He was too much engrossed by his own feelings, as he pronounced these words, to observe in his lordship's countenance an extraordinary emotion. It was visible but for one instant.

With a look more placid, and a tone somewhat below his usual voice, Lord Oldborough said, "You have misjudged me much, Mr Temple, if you have conceived that your feelings, that such feelings would be matter of derision to me. But since you have touched upon this subject, let me give you one hint—Ambition *wears* better than Love."

Lord Oldborough sat down to write, and added, "For one fortnight I can spare you, Mr Temple—Mr Shaw will undertake your part of the business of office. At the end of the ensuing fortnight, I trust you will let me have your answer."

Full of gratitude, Mr Temple could express it only by a bow—and retired. The antechamber was now filling fast for the levee. One person after another stopped him; all had some pressing business, or some business which they thought of consequence either to the nation or themselves.

"Mr Temple, I must trouble you to look over these heads of a bill."

"Mr Temple!—My memorial—just give me your advice."

"Sir—I wrote a letter, three weeks ago, to Lord Oldborough, on the herring fishery, to which I have not had the honour of an answer."

"Mr Temple—the address from Nottingham—Where's the reply?"

"Mr Temple, may I know whether his lordship means to see us gentlemen from the city about the loan?"

"Sir—Pray, sir!—My new invention for rifling cannon—Ordnance Department!—Sir, I did apply—War Office, too, sir!—It's very hard I can't get an answer—bandied about!—Sir, I can't think myself well used—Government shall hear more."

"One word, Mr Temple, if you please, about tithes. I've an idea——"

"Temple, don't forget the Littleford Turnpike Bill."

"Mr Temple, who is to second the motion on Indian affairs?"

"Temple, my good friend, did you speak to Lord Oldborough about my little affair for Tom?"

"Mr Temple, a word in your ear—the member for the borough, *you know*, is dead; letters must be written directly to the corporation."

"Temple, my dear friend, before you go, give me a frank."

At last Mr Temple got away from memorialists, petitioners, grievances, men of business, idle men, newsmen, and dear friends, then hastened to Alfred to unburden his mind—and to rest his exhausted spirits.

Chapter xxvii.

THE moment that Mr Temple reached his friend's chambers, he threw himself into a chair.

"What repose—what leisure—what retirement is here!" cried he. "A man can think and feel a moment for himself."

"Not well, I fear, in the midst of the crackling of these parchments," said Alfred, folding up the deeds at which he had been at work. "However, I have now done my business for this day, and I am your man

for what you please—if you are not engaged by some of your great people, we cannot do better than dine together."

"With all my heart," said Mr Temple.

"And where shall we dine?" said Alfred.

"Anywhere you please. But I have a great deal to say to you, Alfred—don't think of dining yet."

"At the old work!" cried Alfred.

"'You think of convincing, while I think of dining.'"

But, as he spoke, Alfred observed his friend's agitated countenance, and immediately becoming serious, he drew a chair beside Mr Temple, and said, "I believe, Temple, you have something to say that you are anxious about. You know that if there is anything I can do, head, hand, and heart are at your service."

"Of that I am quite sure, else I should not come here to open my heart to you," replied Mr Temple. Then he related all that had just passed between Lord Oldborough and himself, and ended by asking Alfred, whether he thought there was any chance of success for his love?

"You have not told me who the lady is," said Alfred.

"Have not I?—but, surely, you can guess."

"I have guessed—but I wish to be mistaken—Lady Frances Arlington?"

"Quite mistaken. Guess again—and nearer home."

"Nearer home!—One of my sisters?—Not Caroline, I hope?"

"No."

"Then it must be as I once hoped. But why did you never mention it to me before?"

Mr Temple declared that he had thought there was so little chance of his ever being in circumstances in which he could marry, especially a woman who had not

some fortune of her own, that he had scarcely ventured to avow, even to himself, his attachment.

"I thought my love would wear itself out," added he. "Indeed I did not know how serious a business it was, till this sudden proposal was made to me of leaving England: then I felt that I should drag, at every step, a lengthening chain. In plain prose, I cannot leave England without knowing my fate. But don't let me make a fool of myself, Alfred. No man of sense will do more than hazard a refusal: that every man ought to do, or he sacrifices the dignity of the woman he loves to his own false pride. I know that in these days gentlemen suitors are usually expert in *sounding* the relations of the lady they wish to address. To inquire whether the lady is engaged or not is, I think, prudent and honourable: but beyond this, I consider it to be treacherous and base to endeavour, by any indirect means, to engage relations to say what a lover should learn only from the lady herself. Therefore, my dear friend, all I ask is whether you have reason to believe that your sister Rosamond's heart is pre-engaged; or if you think that there is such a certainty of my being rejected, as ought in common prudence to prevent my hazarding the mortification of a refusal?"

Alfred assured his friend, that, to the best of his belief, Rosamond's heart was disengaged. "And," continued he, "as a witness is or ought to be prepared to tell his cause of belief, I will give you mine. Some time since I was commissioned by a gentleman, who wished to address her, to make the previous inquiry, and the answer was, quite disengaged. Now as she did not accept of this gentleman, there is reason to conclude that he did not engage her affections——"

"Was he rich or poor, may I ask?" interrupted Mr Temple.

"That is a leading question," said Alfred.

"I do not want you to tell me who the gentleman was—I know that would not be a fair question, and I trust I should be as far from asking, as you from answering it. But there are so many rich as well as so many poor men in the world, that in answering to the inquiry rich or poor, what city or court man do you name, I want only to draw a general inference as to your sister's taste for wealth."

"Her taste is assuredly not exclusively for wealth; for her last admirer was a gentleman of very large fortune."

"I am happy, at least, in that respect, in not resembling him," said Mr Temple. "Now for my other question—what chance for myself?"

"Of that, my good friend, you must judge for yourself. By your own rule all you have a right to hear is, that I, Rosamond's brother, have no reason for believing that she has such a repugnance to you as would make a refusal certain. And that you may not too much admire my discretion, I must add, that if I had a mind to tell you more, I could not. All I know is that Rosamond, as well as the rest of my family, in their letters spoke of you with general approbation; but I do not believe the idea of considering you as her lover ever entered into her head or theirs."

"But now the sooner it enters the better," cried Mr Temple. "Will you—can you——Have not you business to do for Lord Oldborough at Clermont Park?"

"Yes—and I am glad of it, as it gives me an opportunity of indulging myself in going with you, my dear Temple. I am ready to set out at any moment."

"God bless you! The sooner the better, then. This night in the mail, if you please. I'll run and take our places," said he, snatching up his hat.

"Better send," cried Alfred, stopping him: "my man can run and take places in a coach as well as you. Do you stay with me. We will go to the coffee-house, dine, and be ready to set off."

Mr Temple acceded.

"In the meantime," said Alfred, "you have relations and connexions of your own who should be consulted."

Mr Temple said he was sure that all his relations and connexions would highly approve of an alliance with the Percy family. "But in fact," added he, "that is all they will care about the matter. My relations, though high and mighty people, have never been of any service to me; they are too grand, and too happy, to mind whether a younger son of a younger son sinks or swims; whether I live in single wretchedness or double blessedness. Not one relation has nature given who cares for me half as much as the friend I have made for myself."

Sincerely as Alfred was interested for his success, yet he did not let this friendship interfere with the justice due to his sister, of leaving *her* sole arbitress of a question which most concerned her happiness.

During the last stage of their journey they were lucky enough to have the coach to themselves, and Mr Temple made himself amends for the restraint under which he had laboured during the preceding part of the journey, whilst he had been oppressed by the presence of men whose talk was of the lower concerns of life. After he had descanted for some time on the perfections of his mistress, he ended with expressing his surprise that his friend, who had often of late rallied him upon his being in love, had not guessed sooner who was the object of his passion.

Alfred said that the idea of Rosamond had occurred to him, because his friend's absence of mind might be

dated from the time of his last visit to Clermont Park; "but," said Alfred, "as Lady Frances Arlington was there, and as I had formerly fancied that her ladyship's wish to captivate or dazzle you had not been quite without effect, I was still in doubt, and thought even your praises of Rosamond's disposition and temper, compared with her ladyship's, might only be *ruse de guerre*, or *ruse d'amour*."

"There was no *ruse* in the case," said Mr Temple; "I confess that when I first emerged from my obscurity into all the light and life of the world of fashion, my eyes were dazzled, and before I recovered the use of them sufficiently to compare the splendid objects by which I found myself surrounded, I was wonderfully struck with the appearance of Lady Frances Arlington, and did not measure, as I ought, the immense difference between Lord Oldborough's secretary, and the niece of the Duke of Greenwich. Lady Frances, from mere *gaieté de cœur*, likes to break hearts; and she continully wishes to add one, however insignificant, to the number of her conquests. I, a simple man of literature, unskilled in the wicked ways of the fair, was charmed by her ladyship's innocent naïveté and frank gaiety, and all that was

> 'Strangely wild, or madly gay,
> I call'd it only pretty Fanny's way.'

Fortunately, just as I was in imminent danger of exchanging true sighs for false smiles, I became acquainted with your sister Rosamond. In the country, and under circumstances more favourable for the development of character than any which might occur for months or years in a town life, where all the men and women are merely actors, I had leisure to see and mark the difference and the resemblance between Lady Frances Arlington's character and that of your

sister. They resembled each other in natural quickness of intellect and of feeling; in wit, sprightliness, and enthusiasm, they were also to a certain degree alike. I was amused by Lady Frances Arlington's lively nonsense, till I heard your sister's lively sense. Her ladyship hazards saying everything that occurs to her, and often makes happy hits; but your sister's style of wit is far superior, and far more agreeable, because it has the grace, elegance, and, above all, the infinite variety, which literary allusion supplies. I found myself pleased, not only with what she said, but with the trains of ideas, that, by a single word, she often suggested. Conversing with her, my mind was kept always active, without ever being over-exerted or fatigued. I can look back, and trace the whole progress of my attachment. I began in this way, by finding her conversation most delightful—but soon discovered that she was not only more entertaining and more cultivated, but far more amiable than my idol, Lady Frances, because she had never been an idol, and did not expect to be adored. Then she was more interesting, because more capable of being interested. Lady Frances requires much sympathy, but gives little; and for that enthusiasm of temper which had, at first, charmed me in her ladyship, I began to lose my taste, when I observed that it was always excited by trifles, and by trifles that concerned herself more than any one else. I used to think her—what everybody calls her, a perfectly natural character; and so, perhaps, she is: but not the better for that—since she is what, I am afraid, we all are naturally—selfish. Her ladyship, if I may use the expression, is enthusiastically selfish. Your sister—enthusiastically generous. Lady Frances's manners are caressing, yet I doubt whether she feels affection for any one living, except just at the moment when they are ministering to her fancies.

It was Miss Percy's warm affection for her sister Caroline which first touched my heart. I saw each in her own family. The contrast was striking—in short, by the joint effect of contrast and resemblance, my love for one lady decreased as fast as it increased for the other; and I had just wit and judgment enough to escape from snares that could not have held me long, to chains that have power to hold me for ever."

To this history of the birth and progress of his love, Mr Temple added many expressions of his hopes, fears, and regrets, that he had not five thousand a year, instead of five hundred, to offer his mistress; he at length became absolutely silent. They were within view of the Hills, and too many feelings crowded upon his mind to be expressed in words.

And now we might reasonably contrive to fill

"Twelve vast French romances neatly gilt,"

with the history of the following eventful fortnight, including the first surprise at the arrival of the travellers —the declaration of Mr Temple's love—the astonishment of Rosamond on discovering that she was the object of this passion—of a passion so generous and ardent—the consequent and rapid discovery of a hundred perfections in the gentleman which had before escaped her penetration—the strong peculiar temptation to marry him, because he had not enough to live upon—the reaction of generosity on the other side of the question, which forbade to ruin her lover's fortune —the fluctuations of sentiment and imagination, the delicacies of generosity, gratitude, love, and finally the decision of common sense.

It was fortunate for Rosamond, not only that she had prudent friends, but that they had not made her in the least afraid of their superior wisdom, so that she

had, from the time she was a child, told them every idea, as it rose in her vivid imagination, and every feeling of her susceptible heart; imprudent as she might appear in her confidential conversation, this never passed from words to actions. And now, when she was called upon in an important event of life to decide for herself, she acted with consummate discretion.

Mr Temple's character and manners peculiarly pleased her, and his being a man of birth and family certainly operated much in his favour. Her parents now, as in Mr Gresham's case, did not suffer their own tastes or prepossessions to interfere with her happiness.

Caroline, grateful for the sympathy which Rosamond had always shown her, took the warmest interest in this affair. Caroline was the most excellent, indulgent, yet safe confidante; and as a hearer, she was absolutely indefatigable. Rosamond never found her too busy, too lazy, or too sleepy to listen to her: late at night, early in the morning, or in the most hurried moment of the day, it was all the same—Caroline seemed to have nothing to do but to hear, think, and feel for Rosamond.

The fortnight allowed by Lord Oldborough having now nearly elapsed, it was absolutely necessary Rosamond should come to some decision. Mr Temple's understanding, temper, disposition, and manners, she allowed to be excellent—his conversation was particularly agreeable. In short, after searching in vain for an objection, she was obliged to confess that she liked him. Indeed, before she had allowed this in words, her mother and sister had made the discovery, and had seen the struggle in her mind between love and prudence. Mr Temple's fortune was not sufficient for them to live upon, and she knew that a wife

in his present circumstances must be a burden to him; therefore, notwithstanding all that his passion and all that her own partiality could urge, she decidedly refused his proposal of an immediate union, nor would she enter into any engagement, or suffer him to bind himself by any promise for the future; but he obtained permission to correspond with her during his absence from England, and with the hope that she was not quite indifferent to him, he took leave of her—returned to town—waited upon Lord Oldborough—accepted of the embassy, and prepared for his departure to the Continent.

Now that there was an approaching possibility and probability of hearing of Count Altenberg, Caroline felt it extremely difficult to adhere to her resolution of never thinking of him, especially as her mind, which had been actively occupied and deeply interested in her sister's concerns, was now left to return upon itself in all the leisure of retirement. Fortunately for her, about this time she was again called upon for that sympathy which she was ever ready to give to her friends. She received the following letter from Mrs Hungerford:—

LETTER FROM MRS HUNGERFORD TO MISS CAROLINE PERCY.

"Come, my beloved Caroline, my dear young friend, friend of my family, and of all who are most near and dear to me—come, and enjoy with me and them that happiness, which your judicious kindness long since foresaw, and your prudence promoted.

"My niece, Lady Mary Pembroke, is at last persuaded that she has it in her power to make Mr Barclay permanently happy. He has been obliged to take a considerable length of time to convince her

of the steadiness of his attachment. Indeed, her objection—that he had been charmed by such a coquette as the lady by whom we first saw him captivated—appeared to me strong; and I thought my niece right for adhering to it, more especially as I believed that at the time her affections pleaded against her reason in his favour, and that, if she had been convinced long ago, it would not have been against her will.

"Mr Barclay has behaved like a man of sense and honour. Without disguise he told her of his former attachment to you. She instantly made an answer, which raised her high in my estimation. She replied, that Mr Barclay's being detached from Lady Angelica Headingham by your superior merit was to her the strongest argument in his favour. She must, she said, have felt insecure in the possession of a heart, which had been transferred directly from Lady Angelica to herself, because she was conscious that her own disposition was so different from her ladyship's; but in succeeding to the affection which he had felt for a woman of your character, she should feel perfect security, or at least reasonable hope, that by similar, though certainly inferior qualities, she might ensure his happiness and her own. They are to be married next week. Lady Mary particularly wishes that you should be one of her bride-maids—come then, my love, and bring all my *Percys*. I shall not perfectly enjoy my own and my niece's happiness till you share it with me. My daughter Mortimer insists upon signing this as well as myself.

"Mary-Elizabeth Hungerford.
"Kate Mortimer."

Caroline and *all Mrs Hungerford's Percys* obeyed her summons with alacrity. Lady Mary Pembroke's

marriage with Mr Barclay was solemnized under the happiest auspices, and in the midst of approving and sympathizing friends. As soon as the ceremony was over, and she had embraced and congratulated her niece, Mrs Hungerford turned to Mrs Percy, and in a low voice said, "If it were not too much for one so happy as I am, so rich in blessings, to ask one blessing more, I should ask to be permitted to live to see the day when our dear Caroline——" Mrs Hungerford pressed Mrs Percy's hand, but could say no more; the tears rolled down her cheeks as she looked up to heaven. Some minutes afterwards, following Caroline with her eyes, "Look at her, Mrs Percy!" said Mrs Hungerford. "Did ever selfish coquette, in the height of triumph over lover or rival, enjoy such pleasure as you see sparkling at this moment in that dear girl's countenance?"

The bride and bridegroom set off immediately for Mr Barclay's seat in Berkshire. Lady Florence accompanied her sister; and Mrs Hungerford, after parting from both her nieces, entreated that Caroline might be left with her. "It is a selfish request, I know, my dear; but at my age I cannot afford to be generous of the society of those I love. Allow me to plead my age, and my——Well, I will not say more, since I see it gives you pain, and since I see you will grant the prayer of my petition, rather than hear my claims to your compassion."

Caroline liked particularly to stay with Mrs Hungerford at this time, when there was not any company at the castle, no one but Mrs Hungerford and her daughter, so that she had the full and quiet enjoyment of their society. At this time of her life, and in the state of her mind at this period, no society could have been more agreeable, soothing, and useful to Caroline, than that of such a friend. One, who had not forgotten the

passions of youth; who could give at once sympathy and counsel; who was willing to allow to love its full and exquisite power to exalt the happiness of human life, yet appeared herself, in advanced and serene old age, a constant example of the falsehood of the notion, that the enthusiasm of passion is essential to felicity. An elegant and just distinction has been made by a philosophical writer between *delicacy of passion* and *delicacy of taste*. One leading to that ill-governed susceptibility, which transports the soul to ecstacy, or reduces it to despair, on every adverse or prosperous change of fortune; the other enlarging our sphere of happiness, by directing and increasing our sensibility to objects of which we may command the enjoyment, instead of wasting it upon those over which we have no control. Mrs Hungerford was a striking example of the advantage of cultivating *delicacy of taste*.

At an advanced age, she showed exquisite perception of pleasure in every work of genius; in conversation, no stroke of wit or humour escaped her quick intelligence, no shade of sentiment or politeness was lost upon her; and on hearing of any trait of generosity or greatness of soul, her whole countenance beamed with delight; yet with all this quickness of feeling she was quite free from fastidiousness, and from that irritability about trifles, into which those who indulge *the delicacy of passion* in youth are apt to degenerate in age. Caroline felt, every day, increasing affection as well as admiration for Mrs Hungerford, and found time pass delightfully in her company. Beside that general and well-chosen acquaintance with literature which supplied her with perpetual resources, she had that knowledge of life and of the world which mixes so well, in conversation, with the knowledge of books. She had known, intimately, most of the celebrated people of the last century, and had store of curious and interesting

anecdotes, which she produced with so much taste and judgment, and told so well, as never to fatigue attention. Caroline found that her mind was never passive or dormant in Mrs Hungerford's company; she was always excited to follow some train of thought, to discuss some interesting question, or to reflect upon some new idea. There was, besides, in the whole tenor of her conversation and remarks such an indulgence for human nature, with all its faults and follies, as left the most pleasing and encouraging impression on the mind, and inspired hope and confidence. Her anecdotes and her philosophy all tended to prove that there is more virtue than vice, more happiness than misery, in life; and, above all, that there is a greater probability that the world should improve than that it should degenerate. Caroline felt pleased continually to find her own favourite opinions and hopes supported and confirmed by the experience and judgment of such a woman; and there was something gratifying to her, in being thus distinguished and preferred by one who had read so much and thought so deeply.

As Mrs Hungerford had heard nothing more of Count Altenberg, she wisely forbore to touch upon the subject, or even to mention his name to Caroline; and she saw, with satisfaction, the care with which her young friend turned her mind from every dangerous recollection. Sometimes, however, the remembrance of the count was unavoidably recalled; once, in particular, in turning over the life of Sir Philip Sidney, there was a passage copied in his hand, on a slip of paper, which had accidentally been left in the book.

"Algernon Sidney, in a letter to his son, says, that in the whole of his life he never knew one man, of what condition soever, arrive at any degree of reputation in the world, who made choice of, or delighted in

the company or conversation of those, who in their qualities were inferior, or in their parts not much superior to himself."

"What have you there, my love? Something that pleases and interests you particularly, I see," said Mrs Hungerford, not knowing what it was that Caroline was reading: "show it me, my dear—I am sure I shall like it."

Caroline, deeply blushing, gave her the paper. She recollected the handwriting, and folding up the paper, put it in her pocket-book.

"It is an observation," said she, "that I wish I could write in letters of gold, for the advantage of all the young men in the world in whom I take any interest."

The energetic warmth with which Mrs Hungerford spoke relieved Caroline, as it seemed to justify the delight she had involuntarily expressed—the sentiments for the individual seemed now enveloped in general approbation and benevolence. She never loved Mrs Hungerford better than at this instant.

Mrs Hungerford observed that none of the common sentimental passages, either in poetry or novels, ever seemed to affect Caroline; and to the romantic descriptions of love she was so indifferent, that it might have appeared to a common observer as if she was, and ever would be, a stranger to the passion. By the help of the active and plastic powers of the imagination, any and every hero of a novel could be made, at pleasure, to appear the exact resemblance of each lady's different lover. Some, indeed, professed a peculiar and absolute exclusive attachment, founded on unintelligible or indescribable merits or graces; but these ladies, of all others, she had found were most liable to change, and on farther acquaintance with the world to discover,

on generalizing their notions, similar or superior attractions in new models of perfection. In Caroline, Mrs Hungerford saw none of these capricious fancies, and that it was not her imagination but her reason which gave Count Altenberg the exalted place he held in her esteem. It was therefore with pleasure that this kind lady perceived that her young friend's residence with her soothed her mind, and restored it to its former tone.

But Caroline was soon obliged to leave Hungerford Castle. A letter from Erasmus informed her that poor Lady Jane Granville was ill of a nervous fever, that she had no companion, no one to attend her but a maid-servant, and that she was much in want of some judicious friend who could raise her spirits and tranquillize her mind, which was in a state of continual agitation about her lawsuit. Caroline, remembering Lady Jane's former kindness, thought this a fit opportunity to show her gratitude; and, happy as she was with her friends at Hungerford Castle, she hesitated not a moment to sacrifice her own pleasure.—— Her father and mother approved of her determination, and her brother Alfred carried her to London.

Chapter xxxiv.

IN these days, people travel with so much safety, ease, and celerity, that heroines have little chance of adventures on the road; and a journey is now so common a thing, that, as Rosamond observed, the most brilliant imagination has no hope of having wonders to relate. To Rosamond's mortification, Caroline and her brother reached London without any event having occurred better worth recording than the

loss of an umbrella. They drove into town when it was nearly dark, just before the lamps were lighted; Caroline, therefore, had little satisfaction from the first view of the metropolis. She found Lady Jane Granville in a small lodging in Clarges Street—the room dark—a smell of smoke—the tea-equipage prepared—Lady Jane lying on a shabby-looking sofa—drops and a smelling-bottle on a little table beside her. She raised herself as Caroline entered, looked half-pleased, half-ashamed to see her; and, stretching out her hand, said, in a complaining voice, "Ah! my dear Caroline, are you really come? This is too good! Sadly changed, you find—and everything about me—Sit down, my dear—Keppel, do let us have tea as soon as you can," said Lady Jane.

"As soon as ever Eustace comes in, my lady," answered Keppel peevishly.

"In the meantime, for Heaven's sake, allow us a little more light—I cannot live without light. Come nearer to me, my dear Caroline, and tell me how did you leave all our friends at the Hills?"

Whilst Caroline was answering her ladyship, more candles were brought, and Lady Jane moved them on the table till she threw the light full on Caroline's face.

"Handsomer than ever! And altogether so *formed*. One would not think, Alfred, she had been buried all this time in the country. Ah! perverse child; why would not you come when I could have been of some use to you—when, at least, I could have received you as I ought? This is not a fit place, you see; nor am I now in circumstances, or in a style of life—Heigho!"

"Dr Percy is not come yet," resumed she. "This is his usual hour—and I wrote a note to tell him that he would meet his sister Caroline to-night."

In all her ladyship said, in every look and motion, there was the same nervous hurry and inquietude. Dr Percy arrived, and for a moment Lady Jane forgot herself in sympathy with the pleasure the brother and sister showed at meeting. Soon, however, she would have relapsed into melancholy comparisons, but that Dr Percy checked the course of her thoughts; and with the happy art, by which a physician of conversational powers can amuse a nervous patient, he, without the aid of poppy or mandragora, medicined her to rest, though not to sleep.

When Erasmus was alone with his sister, he observed that no permanent amendment could be expected in Lady Jane's health till her mind should be at ease about her lawsuit. While this was undecided, her imagination vacillated between the horror of neglected poverty, and the hopes of recovering her former splendour and consideration. The lawsuit was not to be decided for some weeks, and Caroline saw that all that could be done in the meantime was as much as possible to soothe and amuse her patient: however tiresome and difficult the task, she went through it with the utmost cheerfulness and sweetness of temper. Day after day she passed alone with Lady Jane, hearing her complaints, bodily and mental, and listening to the eternally repeated history of her lawsuit. But Caroline's patience was ensured by a sense of gratitude, which, in her, was not a sentimental phrase, but a motive for long endurance, still more difficult than active exertion.

One half-hour in the day, however, she was sure of being happy—the half-hour when her brother Erasmus paid his visit. Of Alfred she saw little, for he was so much engaged with business, that a few minutes now and then were all he could possibly spare from his professional duties. Mr Temple called. She

was surprised to see him, for she thought he had been on his way to the Continent; but he told her that difficulties had occurred, chiefly through the manœuvres of Cunningham Falconer, and that he did not know when there would be an end of these—that Lord Oldborough was glad of the delay at present, because he wanted Mr Temple's assistance, as the other secretary had been taken ill, and his lordship had not yet fixed upon a confidential person to supply his place. Of course, in these circumstances, Mr Temple was so much occupied, that Caroline saw very little of him; and she experienced what thousands have observed, that, however people may wish to meet in great towns, it is frequently impracticable, from small difficulties as to time, distance, and connexions. Of Mr Gresham, Caroline had hoped that she should see a great deal—her brother Erasmus had long since introduced him to Lady Jane Granville; and, notwithstanding his being a merchant, her ladyship liked him. He was as much disposed as ever to be friendly to the whole Percy family; and the moment he heard of Caroline's being in town, he hastened to see her, and showed all his former affectionate regard in his countenance and manner. But his time and his thoughts were now engrossed by an affair very near his heart, which he was impatient to bring to a termination. As soon as this should be accomplished he was to set out for Amsterdam, where the concerns of his late partner, old Mr Panton, as his correspondents wrote, imperiously demanded his presence.

This affair which was so near Mr Gresham's heart related to his dear Constance. Alfred had alluded to it in one of his letters, and Erasmus had begun to write the particulars to Rosamond; but he had not at the time leisure to finish the letter, and afterwards burnt it, being uncertain how the romance, as Alfred called it,

might end. He therefore thought it prudent to say nothing about it. The whole story was now told to Caroline, and, briefly, was this.

After old Panton's rage against Dr Percy, in consequence of the suspicion that his daughter was in love with him; after the strange wig scene, and the high words that followed, had driven Erasmus from the house, Constance went to her father, and intent upon doing justice to Erasmus, at whatever hazard to herself, protested that he had not been the cause of her refusal of Lord Roadster. To convince her father of this, she confessed that her heart was not entirely disengaged—no threats, no persuasion, could, however, draw from her the name of the person whom she preferred: she knew that to name him would be only to ruin his fortune—that her father never would consent to her marrying him; nor had the object of her preference ever given her reason to think that he felt anything more for her than regard and respect. Old Panton, the last man in the world to understand any delicacies, thought her whole confession "*nonsense:*" the agitation and hesitation with which it was made, and her eagerness to clear Dr Percy's credit, and to reinstate him in her father's favour, conspired to convince the old man that his "own first original opinion was right." Of this, indeed, he seldom needed any additional circumstances to complete the conviction on any occasion. During the remainder of his life he continued obstinate in his error: "If she likes anybody else, why can't the girl name him? Nonsense—that cursed Dr Percy *is* the man, and he never shall be the man." In this belief old Panton died, and, what is of much more consequence, in this belief he made his will. On purpose to exclude Dr Percy, and in the hope of accomplishing his favourite purpose of ennobling his

descendants, he, in due legal form, inserted a clause in his will, stating, "that he bequeathed his whole fortune (save his wife's dower) to his beloved daughter, upon condition, that within the twelve calendar months next ensuing after his decease, she, the said Constance, should marry a man not below the rank of the son of a baron. But in case she, the said Constance, should not marry within the said twelve calendar months, or should marry any man below the rank of a baron, then and after the expiration of said twelve calendar months, the said fortune to go to his beloved wife, except an annuity of two hundred pounds a year, to be paid thereout to his daughter Constance." Mr Gresham was appointed sole executor to his will. As soon as it was decently possible, after old Panton's decease, Lord Roadster renewed his suit to Constance, and was civilly but very steadily refused. Many other suitors, coming within the description of persons favoured by the will, presented themselves, but without success; some making their application to Constance herself, some endeavouring to win her favour through the intercession of her guardian, Mr Gresham—all in vain. Month after month had passed away, and Mr Gresham began to be much in dread, and Mrs Panton, the stepmother, somewhat in hopes, that the twelve calendar months would elapse without the young lady's having fulfilled the terms prescribed by the will. Mr Gresham, one morning, took his fair ward apart, and began to talk to her seriously upon the subject. He told her that he thought it impossible she should act from mere perverseness or caprice, especially as, from her childhood upwards, he had never seen in her any symptoms of an obstinate or capricious disposition; therefore he was well convinced that she had some good reason for refusing so many offers seemingly unexceptionable:

he was grieved to find that he had not sufficiently won or deserved her confidence, to be trusted with the secret of her heart. Constance, who revered and loved him with the most grateful tenderness, knelt before him; and, clasping his hand in hers, while tears rolled over her blushing cheeks, endeavoured to speak, but could not for some moments. At last, she assured him that delicacy, and the uncertainty in which she was whether she was beloved, were the only causes which had hitherto prevented her from speaking on this subject, even to him, who now stood in the place of her father, and who had ever treated her with more than a father's kindness.

Mr Gresham named Erasmus Percy.

"No."

"Mr Henry!"

"How was it possible that Mr Gresham had never thought of him?"

Mr Gresham had thought of him—had suspected that Mr Henry's love for Constance had been the cause of his quitting England—had admired the young man's honourable silence and resolution—had recalled him from Amsterdam, and he was now in London.

But young Henry, who knew nothing of Mr Gresham's favourable disposition towards him, who had only commercial correspondence with him, and knew little of his character, considered him merely as the executor of Mr Panton, and, with this idea, obeyed his summons home to settle accounts. When they met he was much surprised by Mr Gresham's speaking, not of accounts, but of Constance. When Mr Gresham told him the terms of Mr Panton's will, far from appearing disappointed or dejected, Mr Henry's face flushed with hope and joy. He instantly confessed to her guardian that he loved Constance passionately; and that now, when it could not be supposed he had

mercenary views; now, when no duty, no honour forbade him, he would try his fate. He spoke with a spirit given by strong passion long repressed, and with a decision of character which his modesty and reserve of manner had, till now, prevented from appearing.

"Did he consider," Mr Gresham asked, "what he expected Miss Panton to sacrifice for him?"

"Yes, fortune, not duty—duty he could never have asked her to sacrifice; he could not have esteemed her if she *had* sacrificed duty. As to the rest," added he proudly, "Miss Panton is now to decide between love and fortune."

"This from the modest Mr Henry! from whom, till this moment, I never heard a syllable that savoured of presumption!" said Mr Gresham.

Mr Henry was silent—and stood with an air of proud determination. Regardless of the surprise and attention with which Mr Gresham considered him during this silence, he thought for a few moments, and asked, "Sir, when may I see Miss Panton?"

"And would you," said Mr Gresham, "if it were in your power, sir, reduce the woman you love from opulence to poverty—to distress?"

"I have four hundred a year, Miss Panton has two—six hundred a year is not poverty, sir. Distress—the woman I marry shall never know whilst I have life and health. No, sir, this is not romance. Of my perseverance in whatever I undertake, even when least congenial to my habits, you have had proofs. Mr Gresham, if Miss Panton approves me, and if love can make her happy, I fear not to assert to you, her guardian, that I will make her happy. If she love me not, or," added he, his whole countenance changing from the expression of ardent love to that of cold disdain, "or, if love be not in her mind superior to fortune, then I have little to regret. Wealth and

honours wait her command. But," resumed he, "the trial I will make—the hazard I will run. If I am mistaken—if I am presumptuous—the humiliation be mine—the agony all my own: my heart will bear it—or—break!"

"Heroics!" said Mr Gresham. "Now let me ask——"

"Let me ask, sir—pardon me," interrupted Mr Henry—"Let me beg to see Miss Panton."

"Stay, listen to me, young man——"

"Young gentleman, sir, if you please."

"Young gentleman, sir, if you please," repeated Mr Gresham mildly; "I can make allowance for all this—you were bred a soldier, jealous of honour—but listen to me: there is one thing I must tell you before you see Miss Panton—though I apprehend it may somewhat mortify you, as it will interfere with your boast of disinterestedness and your vow of poverty—Miss Panton I have from her cradle been in the habit of considering partly as my own—my own child—and, as such, I have left her in my will ten thousand pounds. As she will want this money before my death, if she marries you, I must convert my legacy into a marriage-portion, and you shall not, sir, have love without fortune, whatever your heroics may think of it. Now go to your mistress, and keep my secret."

Young Henry was evidently more touched by this generosity than by this bounty, and with a gentleness and humility the most feeling, he said, "How shall I thank you, sir, for bearing with me as you did!"

"Oh!" said Mr Gresham, "old as I am, I know what it is to be in love, and can conceive too what it is to fear that a guardian might be cross, and that the executor and the partner of Mr Panton might act like Mr Panton himself. Say no more—I understand it all, you see—Go to your Constance."

Even in the haughtiness and spirit this young man had shown, Mr Gresham saw the sincerity, strength, and disinterestedness of his affection; and in Mr Gresham's estimation these were no trifling merits. We pass over—shall we be forgiven?—the love-scenes between Mr Henry and Constance. In these cases it is well when there is some sober friend to look to the common sense of the thing, and in the midst of the exaltation to do the necessary business of life. Mr Gresham laid Mr Panton's will before counsel learned in the law, took opinions from two different counsel; from Alfred Percy, whose friendship was likely to quicken his attention, and from another barrister of long standing, who, being totally unconnected with the parties, might probably give a perfectly unbiassed and dispassionate advice. Both agreed that there was no avoiding the clause in the will; that Miss Panton, if she married a man below the rank of a baron's son, must give up her fortune to her stepmother at the end of twelve calendar months from the time of her father's decease; but both barristers gave it as their opinion, that the income during those twelve months belonged to Constance: this was a considerable sum, which, by Mr Gresham's advice, was to be vested with the rest of Mr Henry's capital in the firm of the house of Panton & Co. In consequence of Mr Gresham's earnest recommendation, and of his own excellent conduct and ability, Mr Henry was from this time joined in the firm, and as one of the partners had a secure income proportioned to his part of the capital, besides a share in the very advantageous speculations in which the house was engaged. Mr Gresham undertook to supply Mr Henry's place at Amsterdam, whither he was under the necessity of going. His house he would leave to Constance during his absence. She had best begin by taking possession of it, and establish herself

there, he observed, that she might not have the inconvenience and mortification of being turned out of her own at the end of the year. "And if," said he, "I should be able, when I return, to make Mr Henry's residence with me agreeable to him, I shall hope he will not, while I live, take my Constance quite away from me—I look to her as my chief happiness in life."

If Rosamond had heard the sigh which closed this speech, and if she had seen the simplicity and delicacy of Mr Gresham's generosity on this occasion, she would have reproached herself for refusing him, and would almost have reasoned herself into the belief that she had done very wrong not to marry him; but this belief would only, *could* only, have lasted till she should see Mr Temple again; so that, upon the whole, it was best for poor Mr Gresham that she knew nothing of the matter.

All things being arranged thus in the kindest and most convenient manner by this excellent man, and the day being fixed for the marriage of Constance and Mr Henry, Caroline was asked to be bride's-maid, and the honour of Lady Jane Granville's company was requested. It is inconceivable how much importance Lady Jane attached to the idea of her accepting or refusing this request, and the quantity she talked about it was wonderful! Notwithstanding the habitual theme of her being of no consequence now to any one, of her being utterly forgotten and out of the world, yet she had still a secret, very secret belief, that all she did would be known and commented upon; and she worked herself up to think, also, that the honour to be conferred, or the offence that would be taken in consequence of her decision, would be immortal. Every five minutes for two hours after the first reading of Mr Gresham's note, she took it up, laid it down, and argued the matter pro and con to Caroline.

A long and loud knocking at the door came to Caroline's relief: it was repeated with imperious impatience. "Who is it, my dear? look out of the window, but don't let yourself be seen."

Caroline did not know any of the fashionable equipages, which to Lady Jane appeared a great defect in her education: upon this occasion, however, she thought she recollected the livery to be Mrs Falconer's.

"Oh! no, my dear, quite impossible—the Falconers have not been near me this age. I will tell you whose livery it is—there is a resemblance, but it is astonishing to me a girl of your sense cannot learn the difference—it is old Lady Brangle's livery."

"It might very possibly be so," Caroline allowed.

The servant, however, brought in cards and a note from Mrs Falconer—the note was to announce to Lady Jane Granville the approaching marriage of Miss Falconer with Sir Robert Percy—the day was named, and the honour of Lady Jane Granville's company was requested at the wedding. Lady Jane knew that this communication was made, not in the least in the kindness, but in the pride of Mrs Falconer's heart; and precisely in the same spirit in which it was written Lady Jane thought it incumbent upon her to receive and answer it. Her ladyship was really warm and honest in her friendships, and very grateful to *her branch* of the Percy family, for the kindness they had shown her in adversity.

"I think it extremely ill-judged and ill-bred of Mrs Falconer to invite me to this wedding. Does she think I have no feeling? My own near relations and best friends deprived of their birthright by this Sir Robert Percy—does she conceive it possible that I *could* go to such a wedding?—No; nor did she wish or expect it; she only wrote from vanity, and I shall answer her with pride, which, at least, is somewhat superior to that

mean passion; and I shall go, I am now determined, to Mr Gresham's—I do nothing by halves."

Her ladyship immediately wrote answers to both the invitations. Nothing for months had done her so much good as the exertion, interest, and imaginary self-importance these two notes created. At Mr Gresham's on the day of the wedding her ladyship appeared with great dignity, and was satisfied that she had conferred honour and serious obligation. Could she have seen into the minds of all the company, she would have been astonished to find how little she occupied their thoughts. It would be difficult to determine whether it is more for the happiness or misery of man and womankind that politeness should cherish, or truth destroy, these little delusions of self-love.

Presently there appeared in the newspapers a splendid account of the marriage at St George's Church, Hanover Square, of Sir Robert Percy, of Percy Hall, with Arabella, the eldest daughter of J. Falconer, Esquire; present at the ceremony was a long list of *fashionable friends*, who, as Lady Jane Granville observed, "would not have cared if the bride had been hanged the next minute." The happy pair, after partaking of an elegant collation, set out in a barouche and four for Percy Hall, the seat of Sir Robert Percy.

"So!" cried Lady Jane, throwing down the paper, "Mrs Falconer has accomplished that match at last, and has got one of her daughters well off her hands —the ugly one too. Upon my word, she is amazingly clever. But, after all, the man has a horrid temper, and a very bad character. Now it is over, my dear Caroline, I must tell you, that long ago, before I was so well aware of what sort of a man he was, I had formed the plan of marrying him to you, and so uniting the two branches, and bringing the estate into your family; but we have often reason to rejoice that our

best-concerted schemes don't succeed. I give Mrs Falconer joy. For worlds I would not have such a man married to any relation or friend of mine——Oh! if I recover my fortune, Caroline, I have hopes for you!"

Her ladyship was interrupted by the arrival of Mr Gresham, who came to take leave, as he was just setting out for Holland. He was a man who said less and did more for his friends, as Caroline observed, than almost any person she knew. On seeing his gallery of paintings, she had noticed some beautiful miniatures; he now brought all those which she had admired, and begged to leave them with her during his absence, that she might at her leisure copy any of them she liked. He knew she painted in miniature, for he had long ago, when at the Hills, seen her copy of M. de Tourville's picture of Euphrosyne.

"If," said Mr Gresham, observing that Caroline scrupled to take charge of so many precious pictures, "if you are too proud to receive from me the slightest kindness without a return, I am willing to put myself under an obligation to you. While I am away, at your leisure, make me a copy of that Euphrosyne—I shall love it for your sake, and as reminding me of the time when I first saw it—the happiest time perhaps of my life," added he, in a low voice.

"Oh! Rosamond," thought Caroline, "if you had heard that!—and if you knew how generously kind he has been to your brothers!"

At parting from Alfred and Erasmus, he said to them, "My good young friends, why don't either of you marry? To be sure, you are young enough; but think of it in time, and don't put off, put off, till you grow into old bachelors. I know young men generally in these days say, they find it too expensive to marry—some truth in that, but more selfishness: here's young

Mr Henry has set you a good example. Your practice in your professions, I suppose, puts you as much at ease in the world by this time as he is. Malthus, you know, whom I saw you studying the other day, objects only to people marrying before they can maintain a family. Alfred, when I was at the Hills, I heard of a certain Miss Leicester. If you shall think of marrying before I come back again, you'll want a house, and I've lent mine already—but money, you know, can place one in any part of the town you might like better—I have a sum lying idle at my bankers, which I have just had transferred to the account of Alfred and Erasmus Percy —whichever of you marry before I come back, must do me the favour to purchase a good house—I must have it at the polite end of the town, or I shall be worse than an old bachelor—let me find it well furnished and aired—nothing airs a house so well as a warm friend: then, you know, if I should not fancy your purchase, I leave it on your hands, and you pay me the purchase-money year by year, at your leisure—if you can trust that I will not throw you into jail for it."

The warmth of Alfred's thanks in particular showed Mr Gresham that he had not been mistaken about Miss Leicester.

"I wish I had thought, or rather I wish I had spoken of this sooner," added Mr Gresham: "perhaps I might have had the pleasure of seeing you married before my leaving England; but—no—it is best as it is—I might have hurried things—and in these matters everybody likes to go their own pace, and their own way. So fare ye well—God bless you both, and give you good wives—I can ask nothing better for you from Heaven."

No man could be more disposed than Alfred felt himself at this instant to agree with Mr Gresham, and to marry immediately—visions of beauty and happi-

ness floated before his imagination; but a solicitor knocking at the door of his chambers recalled him to the sense of the sad necessity of finishing some law-papers instead of going into the country to see his fair mistress. His professional duty absolutely required his remaining in town the whole of this term—Lady Jane Granville's business, in particular, depended upon him—he gave his mind to it. She little knew how difficult it was to him at this time to fix his attention, or how much temper it required in these circumstances to bear with her impatience. The week before her cause was expected to come to trial, her ladyship's law-fever was at its height—Alfred avoided her presence, and did her business.

The day arrived—her cause came on—Alfred's exertions proved successful—and hot from the courts he brought the first joyful news—a decree in her favour!

Lady Jane started up, clasped her hands, embraced Alfred, embraced Caroline, returned thanks to Heaven—again and again, in broken sentences, tried to express her gratitude. A flood of tears came to her relief. "Oh! Alfred, what pleasure your generous heart must feel!"

From this day—from this hour, Lady Jane's health rapidly recovered; and, as Erasmus observed, her lawyer had at last proved her best physician.

When Caroline saw Lady Jane restored to her strength, and in excellent spirits, preparing to take possession of a handsome house in Spring Gardens, she thought she might be spared to return to her own family. But Lady Jane would not part with her; she insisted upon keeping her the remainder of the winter, promising to carry her back to the Hills in a few weeks. It was plain that refusing this request would renew the ire of Lady Jane, and render irrecon-

cilable the quarrel between her ladyship and the Percy family. Caroline felt extremely unwilling to offend one whom she had obliged, and one who really showed such anxiety for her happiness.

"I know, my dear Lady Jane," said she, smiling, "that if I stay with you, you will form a hundred kind schemes for my establishment; but forgive me when I tell you, that it is upon the strength of my belief in the probability that they will none of them be accomplished, that I consent to accept your ladyship's invitation."

"Perverse! provoking and incomprehensible!—— But since you consent to stay, my dear, I will not quarrel with your motives: I will let them rest as philosophically unintelligible as you please. Be satisfied, I will never more accuse you of perversity in refusing me formerly; nor will I convict you of inconsistency for obliging me now. The being convicted of inconsistency I know is what you people, who pique yourselves upon being rational, are so afraid of. Now we *everyday people*, who make no pretensions to be reasonable, have no character for consistency to support—you cannot conceive what delightful liberty we enjoy. In lieu of whole tomes of casuistry, the simple phrase, 'I've changed my mind,' does our business. Do let me hear if you could prevail upon yourself to say so."

"I've changed my mind," said Caroline playfully.

"That's candid—now I love as well as admire you."

"To be entirely candid, then," said Caroline, "I must, my dear Lady Jane, if you will give me leave, tell you more."

"As much as you please," said Lady Jane, "for I am naturally curious, particularly when young ladies blush."

Caroline thought that, however Lady Jane and she might differ on some points, her ladyship's anxiety to promote her happiness, in the way she thought most advantageous, deserved not only her gratitude but her confidence. Besides, it would be the most effectual way, she hoped, of preventing Lady Jane from forming any schemes for her establishment, to confess at once that she really believed it was not likely she should meet with any person, whose character and merits were equal to those of Count Altenberg, and any one inferior to him she was determined never to marry. She added a few words, as delicately as she could, upon the dread she felt of being presented in society as a young lady wishing for an establishment.

Lady Jane heard all she said upon this subject with much attention; but when she had finished, her ladyship said to herself, "Nonsense!—Every young lady thinks one lover perfect till she has seen another. Before Caroline has passed a month in fashionable society, provided she has a fashionable admirer, we shall hear no more of this Count Altenberg."

"Well, my dear," said she, holding out her hand to Caroline, "I will give you my word I will, to the best of my ability, comply with all your conditions. You shall not be advertised as a young lady in search of a husband—but just as if you were a married woman, you will give me leave to introduce my acquaintance to you; and if they should find out, or if in time you should find out, that you are not married, you know, I shall not be to blame."

Chapter xxxiv.

BEHOLD Lady Jane Granville reinstated in her fortune, occupying a fine house in a fashionable situation, with suitable equipage and establishment; carriages rolling to her door; tickets crowding her servants' hands; an influx, an affluence of friends, and congratulations such as quite astonished Caroline.

"Where were these people all the time she lived in Clarges Street?" thought she.

Lady Jane, though she knew from experience the emptiness and insincerity of such demonstrations of regard, was, nevertheless, habitually pleased by them, and proud to be in a situation where numbers found it worth while to pay her attentions. But notwithstanding her *foibles*, she was not a mere fashionable friend. She was warm in her affection for Caroline. The *producing* her young friend in the great London world was her prime object.

The pretensions of individuals are often cruelly mortified when they come to encounter the vast competition of a capital city. As King James said to the country gentleman at court, "The little vessels, that made a figure on the lake, appear insignificant on the ocean!"

Happily for Caroline, she had not formed high expectations of pleasure, any hope of producing *effect*, or even *sensation*, upon her first appearance in the fashionable world. As she said in her letters to her friends at home, nothing could be more dull or tiresome than her first experience of a young lady's introduction into life; nothing, as she assured Rosamond, could be less like the reality than the delightful representations in novels, where every day produces new scenes, new adventures, and new characters. She was ashamed to write such stupid letters from London; but

unless she were to have recourse to invention, she literally had not anything entertaining to tell. She would, if Rosamond was in despair, invent a few conquests; and like great historians, put in some fine speeches supposed to have been spoken by celebrated characters.

In reality, Caroline's beauty had not passed so completely unobserved as her modesty and inexperience imagined. She did not know the signs of the times. On her first entrance into a public room eyes turned upon her—the eyes of mothers with apprehension, of daughters with envy. Some gentlemen looked with admiration, others with curiosity.

"A new face! Who is she?"

"A relation of Lady Jane Granville."

"What has she?"

"I don't know—nothing, I believe."

"Nothing, certainly—a daughter of the Percy who lost his fortune."

All apprehensions ceased on the part of the ladies, and generally all admiration on the part of the gentlemen. Opera-glasses turned another way. Pity succeeding to envy, a few charitably disposed added, "Ah! poor thing! unprovided for—What a pity!"

"Do you dance to-night?"

"Does our quadrille come next?"

Some gentleman, an abstract admirer of beauty, perhaps, asked the honour of her hand—to dance; but there the abstraction generally ended. A few, indeed, went farther, and swore that she was a fine girl, prophesied that she would *take*, and declared they would be d—d if they would not *think* of her, if they could afford it.

From their prophecies or their oaths nothing ensued, and even the civilities and compliments she received from Lady Jane's particular friends and acquaintance,

though in a more polite style, were equally unmeaning and unproductive. Days passed without leaving a trace behind.

Unluckily for Caroline, her brother Alfred was about this time obliged to leave town. He was summoned to the country by Dr Leicester. Dr Percy was so continually employed, that she could scarcely have a few minutes in a week of his company, now that Lady Jane's health no longer required his professional attendance. Caroline, who had always been used to domestic society and conversation, was thus compelled to live completely in public, without the pleasures of home, and without the amusement young people generally enjoy in company, when they are with those of their own age to whom they can communicate their thoughts. Lady Jane Granville was so much afraid of Caroline's not appearing fashionable, that she continually cautioned her against expressing her natural feelings at the sight of anything new and surprising, or at the perception of the tiresome or ridiculous. Her ladyship would never permit her protégée to ask the name of any person in public places or at private parties—because not to know certain people "argues yourself unknown."

"I'll tell you who everybody is when we go home:" but when she was at home, Lady Jane was generally too much tired to explain or to comprehend the description of these nameless bodies; and even when her ladyship was able to satisfy her curiosity, Caroline was apt to mistake afterwards the titles and histories of the personages, and by the misnomers of which she was guilty, provoked Lady Jane past endurance. Whether it was from want of *natural genius* in the scholar, or interest in the study, or from the teacher's thus unphilosophically separating the name and the idea, it is certain that Caroline made but

slow progress in acquiring her fashionable nomenclature. She was nearly in despair at her own want of memory, when fortunately a new instructress fell in her way, who was delighted with her ignorance, and desired nothing better than to tell her who was who; in every private party and public place to point out the ridiculous or notorious, and at the moment the figures were passing, whether they heard or not, to relate anecdotes characteristic and illustrative: this new, entertaining preceptress was Lady Frances Arlington. Her ladyship having quarrelled with Miss Georgiana Falconer, hated to go out with Mrs Falconer, hated still more to stay at home with the old tapestry-working duchess her aunt, and was delighted to have Lady Jane Granville to take her everywhere. She cared little what any person thought of herself, much less what they thought of Caroline: therefore, free from all the delicacies and anxieties of Lady Jane's friendship and systems, Lady Frances, though from different premises coming to the same conclusion, agreed that thinking of Caroline's advantage was *stuff!* and that all she had to do was to amuse herself in town. Caroline was the most convenient companion to go out with, for she never crossed her ladyship about partners, or admirers, never vied with her for admiration, or seemed to mind her *flirtations;* but quietly suffering her to draw off all the fashionable beaux, whom Lady Jane stationed upon duty, she let Lady Frances Arlington talk, or dance, to her heart's content, and was satisfied often to sit still and be silent. The variety of words and ideas, facts and remarks, which her lively and practised companion poured into her mind, Caroline was left to class for herself, to generalise, and to make her own conclusions. Now she had means of amusement, she took pleasure in observing all that was going on, and she knew some-

thing of the characters and motives of the actors in such different scenes. As a spectator, she was particularly struck by the eagerness of all the players, at their different games of love, interest, or ambition; and in various sets of company, she was diverted by observing how each thought themselves the whole world: here a party of young ladies and gentlemen, practising, morning, noon, and night, steps for their *quadrille;* and while they are dancing the *quadrille*, jockey gentlemen ranged against the wall in the ball-room, talking of their horses; grave heads and snuff-boxes in a corner settling the fate of Europe, proving that they were, are, or ought to be, behind the scenes; at the card-tables, sharpened faces seeing nothing in the universe but their cards; and at the pianoforte a set of signors and signoras, and ladies of quality, mingled together, full of duets, solos, overtures, cavatinas, expression, execution, and thorough bass—mothers in agonies, daughters pressed or pressing forward—some young and trembling with shame—more, though young, yet confident of applause—others, and these the saddest among the gay, veteran female exhibitors, tired to death, yet forced to continue the unfruitful glories. In one grand party, silence and state; in another group, rival matrons chasing round the room the heir-presumptive to a dukedom, or wedging their daughters closer and closer to that door-way through which Lord William * * * * * must pass. Here a poet acting enthusiasm with a *chapeau bras*—there another dying of ennui to admiration; here a wit cutting and slashing right or wrong; there a man of judgment standing by, silent as the grave—all for notoriety;—whilst others of high rank, birth, or wealth, without effort or merit, secure of distinction, looked down with sober contempt upon the poor strugglers and wranglers for fame.

Caroline had as yet seen but few of the literary candidates for celebrity; only those privileged few, who, combining the pretensions of rank and talent, had a natural right to be in certain circles; or those who, uniting superior address to superior abilities, had risen or forced their way into fine company. Added to these were two or three, who were invited to parties as being the wonder and show of the season —persons whom the pride of rank found it gratifying to have at command, and who afforded to them a most happy relief from the dulness of their habitual existence. Caroline, though pitying the exhibitors, whenever she met any of this description, had great curiosity to see more of literary society; but Lady Jane systematically hung back on this point, and evaded her promises.

"Yes, my dear, I did promise to take you to Lady Angelica Headingham's, and Lady Spilsbury's, but there's time enough—not yet—not till I have established you in a higher society: not for your advantage to get among the blue-stockings—the blue rubs off—and the least shade might ruin you with some people. If you were married, I should introduce you to that set with pleasure, for they entertain me vastly, and it is a great privation to me this winter —a long fast; but even this abstinence from wit I can endure for your sake, my dear Caroline—you are my first object. If you would take the *bel esprit* line decidedly——Talents you have, but not courage sufficient; and even if you had, you are scarce old enough: with your beauty and grace, you have a better chance in the circle you are in, my dear."

But Lady Frances Arlington, who thought only of her own chance of amusement, seconded Caroline's wish to see the literary set. Nothing could be more stupid, her ladyship said, than running round always

in the same circle; for her part, she loved to see clever odd people, and though her aunt-duchess would not let her go to Lady Spilsbury's, yet Lady Frances was sure that, with Lady Jane Granville for her chaperon, she could get a passport for Lady Angelica Headingham's, "because Lady Angelica is a sort of cousin, I can't tell you how many times removed, but just as many as will serve my present purpose—a connexion quite near enough to prove her fashionable, and respectable, and all that: so, my dear Lady Jane——I'll ask leave," concluded Lady Frances, "and we will go next conversazione day."

No—Lady Jane was firm to what she believed to be for Caroline's interest, and she refused to take her into *that set*, and therefore declined the honour of chaperoning her ladyship to Lady Angelica Headingham's.

"Oh! my dear Lady Jane, you couldn't, you wouldn't be so cruel! When I am dying with impatience to see my cousin make herself ridiculous, as I hear she does more and more every day with that Baron Wilhelmberg—Wilhelmberg, I said, not Altenberg—Miss Caroline Percy need not have turned her head so quickly. Lady Angelica's man is a German, and yours was a Pole, or Prussian, was not he?—Do you know the ugliest man I ever saw in my life, and the handsomest, were both Poles—but they are all well-bred."

"But about Lady Angelica's German baron?" interrupted Lady Jane.

"Yes, what sort of a person is he?" said Caroline.

"As unlike your Count Altenberg as possible—an oddish-looking genius—oldish, too—like one's idea of an alchymist, or a professor, or a conjuror—like anything rather than a man of fashion; but, nevertheless,

since he has got into fashion, the ladies have all found out that he is very like a Roman emperor—and so he is—like *any* head on an old coin."

"But how comes there to be such a value set on this head?—How came he into fashion?" said Lady Jane.

"Is it possible you don't know? Oh! it was when you were out of the world he first made the great noise—by dreaming—yes, dreaming—dreaming himself, and making everybody else dream as he pleases; he sported last season a new theory of dreaming—joins practice to theory, too—very extraordinary—interprets all your dreams to your satisfaction, they say—and, quite on philosophical principles, can make you dream whatever he pleases. True, upon my veracity."

"Did your ladyship ever try his skill?" said Lady Jane.

"Not I; for the duchess would not hear of him—but I long the more to know what he could make me dream. He certainly is very clever, for he was asked last winter everywhere. All the world ran mad—Lady Spilsbury, and my wise cousin, I understand, came to pulling wigs for him. Angelica conquered at last; you know Angelica was always a little bit of a coquette—not a *little* bit neither. At first, to be sure, she thought no more of love for the German emperor than I do this minute; but he knew how to coquet also—Who would have thought it?—So there were notes, and verses, and dreams, and interpretations, and I can't tell you what. But, so far, the man is no charlatan—he has made Lady Angelica dream the very dream he chose—the strangest, too, imaginable—that she is in love with him. And the interpretation is, that she will take him 'for better for worse.'"

"That is your own interpretation, is not it, Lady Frances?" said Caroline.

"Is it possible there is any truth in it?" said Lady Jane.

"All true, positively, I hear. And of all things, I should like to see Lady Angelica and the baron face to face—tête-à-tête—or profile by profile, in the true Roman emperor and empress medal style."

"So should I, I confess," said Lady Jane, smiling.

"The best or the worst of it is," continued Lady Frances, "that, after all, this baron bold is, I've a notion, no better than an adventurer; for I heard a little bird sing, that a certain ambassador hinted confidentially, that the Baron de Wilhelmberg would find it difficult to prove his sixteen quarterings. But now, upon both your honours, promise me you'll never mention this—never give the least confidential hint of it to man, woman, or child; because it might get round, spoil our sport, and never might I have the dear delight of drawing the caricature."

"*Now* your ladyship is not serious, I am sure," said Caroline.

"Never more serious—never so serious in my life; and, I assure you," cried Lady Frances, speaking very earnestly and anxiously, "if you give the least hint, I will never forgive you while I live; for I have set my heart on doing the caricature."

"Impossible that, for the mere pleasure of drawing a caricature, you would let your own cousin expose herself with an adventurer!" said Caroline.

"La! Lady Angelica is only my cousin a hundred removes. I can't help her being ridiculous: everybody, I dare say, has ridiculous cousins—and laugh one must. If one was forbid to laugh at one's relatives, it would be sad indeed for those who have extensive connexions. Well, Lady Jane, I am glad to see that *you* don't pique

yourself on being too good to laugh; so I may depend on you. Our party for Lady Angelica's is fixed for Monday."

No—Lady Jane had, it is certain, some curiosity and some desire to laugh at her neighbour's expence. So far, Lady Frances had, with address, touched her foible for her purpose; but Lady Jane's affection for Caroline strengthened her against the temptation. She was persuaded that it would be a disadvantage to her to go to this conversazione. She would not upon any account have Miss Percy be seen in the blue-stocking set at present—she had her reasons. To this resolution, her ladyship adhered, though Lady Frances Arlington, pertinacious to accomplish any purpose she took into her fancy, returned morning after morning to the charge. Sometimes she would come with intelligence from her fetcher and carrier of news, as she called him, Captain Nuttall.

One day, with a very dejected countenance, her ladyship came in, saying, "It's off—it's all off! Nuttall thinks it will never be a match."

The next day, in high spirits, she brought word, "It's on—it's on again! Nuttall thinks it will certainly be a match—and Angelica is more delightfully ridiculous than ever! Now, my dear Lady Jane, Tuesday?—next week?—the week afterwards? In short, my dearest Lady Jane, once for all, will you ever take me to her conversazione?"

"Never, my dear Lady Frances, till Miss Caroline Percy is married," said Lady Jane: "I have my own reasons."

"Then I wish Miss Caroline Percy was to be married to-morrow—I have my own reasons. But, after all, tell me, is there any, the least chance of Miss Percy's being married?"

"Not the least chance," said Caroline.

"That is her own fault," said Lady Jane, looking mortified and displeased.

"That cannot be said of me, there's one comfort," cried Lady Frances. "If I'm not married, 'tis not my fault; but my papa's, who, to *make an eldest son*, left me only a poor £5000 portion. What a shame to rob daughters for sons, as the grandees do! I wish it had pleased Heaven to have made me the daughter of an honest merchant, who never thinks of this impertinence: then, with my plum or plums, I might have chosen the first spendthrift lord in the land, or, may be, I might have been blessed with an offer from that paragon of perfection, Lord William ——. Do you know what made him such a paragon of perfection? His elder brother's falling sick, and being like to die. Now, if the brother should recover, adieu to my Lord William's perfections."

"Not in the opinion of all," said Lady Jane. "Lord William was a favourite of mine, and I saw his merit long ago, and shall see it, whether his elder brother dies or recovers."

"At all events," continued Lady Frances, "he will be a paragon, you will see, only till he is married, and then—

> 'How shall I your true love know
> From any other man?'

By-the-bye, the other day, Lord William, in flying from the chase of matrons, in his fright (he always looks like a frightened hare, poor creature!) took refuge between you two ladies. Seriously, Lady Jane, do you know I think you *manage* vastly well for your protégée—you are not so *broad* as Mrs Falconer."

"*Broad!* I beg your ladyship's pardon for repeating your word," cried Lady Jane, looking quite angry, and feeling too angry to parry, as she usually did,

with wit: "I really don't understand your ladyship."

"Then I must wish your ladyship a good morning, for I've no time or talents for explanation," said Lady Frances, running off, delighted to have produced a sensation.

Lady Jane rang for her carriage, and made no observations on what had passed. But in the evening she declared that she would not take Lady Frances Arlington out with her any more, that her ladyship's spirits were too much for her. "Besides, my dear Caroline, when she is with you, I never hear you speak a word—you leave it entirely to her ladyship. After all, she is, if you observe, a perfectly selfish creature."

Lady Jane recollected various instances of this.

"She merely makes a tool of me—my carriage, my servants, my time, myself, always to be at her service, whenever the aunt-duchess cannot, or will not, do her ladyship's behests. For the slightest errand she could devise, she would send me to the Antipodes; bid me fetch her a toothpick from the farthest inch of the city. Well! I could pardon all the trouble she gives for her fancies, if she would take any trouble for others in return. No—ask her to do the least thing for you, and she tells you, she'd be very glad, but she does not know how; or, she would do it this minute, but that she has not time; or, she would have remembered it certainly, but that she forgot it."

Caroline admitted that Lady Frances was thoughtless and giddy, but she hoped not incurably selfish, as Lady Jane now seemed to suppose.

"Pardon me, she is incurably selfish. Her childishness made me excuse her for a great while: I fancied she was so giddy that she could not remember anything; but I find she never forgets anything on which

she has set her own foolish head. Giddy! I can't bear people who are too giddy to think of anybody but themselves."

Caroline endeavoured to excuse her ladyship, by saying that, by all accounts, she had been educated in a way that must make her selfish. "Idolized, and spoilt, I think you told me she was?"

"True, very likely; let her mother, or her grandmother, settle that account—I am not to blame, and I will not suffer for it. You know, if we entered like your father into the question of education, we might go back to Adam and Eve, and find nobody to blame but them. In the meantime, I will not take Lady Frances Arlington out with me any more—on this point I am determined; for, suppose I forgave her selfishness and childishness, and *all that*, why should I be subject to her impertinence? She has been suffered to say whatever comes into her head and to think it wit. Now, as far as I am concerned, I will teach her better."

Caroline, who always saw the best side of characters, pleaded her freedom from art and dissimulation.

"My dear Caroline, she is not half so free from dissimulation as you are from envy and jealousy. She is always in your way, and you never see it. I can't bear to hear you defend her, when I know she would and does sacrifice you at any time and at all times to her own amusement. But she shall not stand in your light—for you are a generous unsuspicious creature. Lady Frances shall never go out with me again—and I have just thought of an excellent way of settling that matter. I'll change my coach for a vis-à-vis, which will carry only two."

This Lady Jane, quick and decided, immediately accomplished; she adhered to her resolution, and never did take Lady Frances Arlington out with her more.

Returning from a party this evening—a party where they met Lord William, who had sat beside Caroline at supper—Lady Jane began to reproach her with having been unusually reserved and silent.

Caroline said she was not conscious of this.

"I hope and trust I am not too broad," continued Lady Jane, with a very proud and proper look; "but I own, I think there is as much indelicacy in a young lady's hanging back too much as in her coming too forward. And gentlemen are apt to overrate their consequence as much, if they find you are afraid to speak to them, as if you were to talk—like Miss Falconer herself."

Caroline assented fully to the truth of this remark; assured Lady Jane that she had not intentionally hung back or been reserved; that she had no affectation of this sort. In a word, she promised to exert herself more in conversation, since Lady Jane desired it.

"I do wish it, my dear: you don't *get on*—there's no *getting you on*. You certainly do not talk enough to gentlemen when they sit beside you. It will be observed."

"Then, ma'am, I hope it will be observed, too," said Caroline, smiling, "that the gentlemen do not talk to me."

"No matter—you should find something to say to them—you have plenty of gold but no ready change about you. Now, as Lord Chesterfield tells us, you know, that will never do."

Caroline was perfectly sensible of this—she knew she was deficient in the sort of conversation of the moment requisite for fine company and public places.

"But when I have nothing to say, is not it better for me to say nothing, ma'am?"

"No, my dear—half the world are in that predicament; but would it mend our condition to reduce our

parties to Quakers' silent meetings? My dear, you must condescend to talk without saying anything—and you must bear to hear and say the same things a hundred times over; and another thing, my dear Caroline —I wish you could cure yourself of looking fatigued. You will never be thought agreeable, unless you can endure, without showing that you are tired, the most stupid people extant——"

Caroline smiled, and said she recollected her father's telling her that "the Prince de Ligne, the most agreeable man of his day, declared that his secret depended not on his wit or talents for conversation, but on his power of concealing the ennui he felt in stupid company."

"Well, my dear, *I* tell you so, as well as the Prince de Ligne, and let me see that you profit by it to-morrow."

The next night they went to a large party, at a very fine lady's. It was dull, but Caroline did her best to look happy, and exerted herself to talk to please Lady Jane, who, from her card-table, from time to time, looked at her, nodded, and smiled. When they got into their carriage, Lady Jane, before she had well drawn up the glass, began to praise her for her performance this evening. "Really, my dear, you got on very well to-night; and I hear Miss Caroline Percy is very agreeable. And, shall I tell you who told me so?—No; that would make you too vain. But I'll leave you to sleep upon what has been said—to-morrow you shall hear more."

The next morning, Caroline had stolen away from visitors, and quietly in her own room was endeavouring to proceed in her copy of the miniature for Mr Gresham, when Lady Jane came into her apartment, with a letter and its cover in her hand. "A letter, in which you, Caroline, are deeply concerned."

A sudden hope darted across Caroline's imagination, and illuminated her countenance. As suddenly it vanished, when she saw on the cover of the letter no foreign post-mark—no foreign hand—but a hand unknown to her.

"Deeply concerned! How can I—how—how am I concerned in this, ma'am?" she asked, with difficulty commanding her voice to articulate the words.

"Only a proposal for you, my dear," said Lady Jane, smiling: "not a proposal for which you need blush, as you'll see, if you'll read."

But observing that Caroline was not at this moment capable of reading, without seeming to notice the tremor of her hand, and that she was holding the letter upside down before her eyes, Lady Jane, with kind politeness, passed on to the picture at which her young friend had been at work, and stooping to examine the miniature with her glass, made some observations on the painting, and gave Caroline time to recover. Nor did her ladyship look up till Caroline exclaimed, "John Clay!—English Clay!"

"Yes—Clay, of Clay Hall, as Mrs Falconer would say. You see, my love, I told you truly, it was no blushing matter. I am sorry I startled you by my abruptness. *Surprises* are generally ill-judged—and always ill-bred. Acquit me, I beseech you, of all but thoughtlessness," said Lady Jane, sitting down by Caroline, and kindly taking her hand: "I hope you know I am not Mrs Falconer."

"I do, indeed," said Caroline, pressing her hand: "I feel all your kindness, all your politeness."

"Of course, I knew that a proposal from Clay, of Clay Hall, would be to you—just what it is to me," said Lady Jane. "I hope you cannot apprehend that, for the sake of his seven or ten thousand, whatever he

has per annum, I should press such a match upon you, Caroline? No, no, you are worth something much better."

"Thank you, my dear Lady Jane," cried Caroline, embracing her with warm gratitude.

"Why, child, you could not think me so—merely mercenary. No; touch me upon family, or fashion—any of my aristocratic prejudices, as your father calls them—and I might, perhaps, be a little peremptory. But John Clay is a man just risen from the ranks, lately promoted from being a manufacturer's son to be a subaltern in good company, looking to rise another step by purchase: no, no—a Percy could not accept such an offer—no loss of fortune could justify such a *mésalliance*. Such was my first feeling, and I am sure yours, when you read at the bottom of this awkwardly folded epistle, 'Your ladyship's most devoted, &c. John Clay'——"

"I believe I had no feeling but pure surprise," said Caroline. "I scarcely think Mr Clay can be in earnest—for, to the best of my recollection, he never spoke five words to me in his life!"

"English Clay, my dear. Has not he said everything in one word?—I should have been a little surprised, but that I have been seeing this good while the *dessous des cartes*. Don't flatter yourself that love for you offers Clay Hall—no; but hatred to Mrs and Miss Falconer. There have been quarrels upon quarrels, and poor Lady Trant in the middle of them, unable to get out—and John Clay swearing he is not to be *taken in*—and Miss Falconer buffeting Lady Trant with the willow he left on her brows—and Mrs Falconer smiling through the whole, and keeping the secret, which everybody knows: in short, my dear, 'tis not worth explaining to you—but John Clay certainly hopes to complete the mortification of the Falconers by giving

himself to you. Besides, you are in fashion. Too much has been said about him—I'm tired of him. Write your answer, my dear—or I'm to write, am I? Well, give me some gilt paper—let us do the thing properly." Properly the thing was done—the letter folded, not awkwardly, was sealed and sent, Caroline delighted with Lady Jane, and Lady Jane delighted with herself.

"So there's an end of that matter," said Lady Jane. "I saw how it would be long ago; but I was glad you saw nothing of it, lest you should not have let it come to a declaration. A refusal is always creditable; therefore, I own, I should have been mortified, if the season had passed without your having one proposal. But now you have nothing to be ashamed of—you've killed your man—and I hope and trust I shall live to see you kill another."

Caroline laughed, but said she was glad Lady Jane was not one of those who count refusals as so many proofs of a young lady's merit; for her own part, she acknowledged she was inclined to think that they were sometimes proofs rather of coquetry and duplicity.

Lady Jane hesitated, and said she did not see this—she could not agree to this.

The conversation went on, till her ladyship and Caroline came to a complete opposition of opinion on a principle, which, though it was only stated in general, and in the abstract, her ladyship defended with an urgency, and Caroline resisted with a steadiness which are seldom shown about any merely speculative point, unless there is some secret apprehension of their being soon reduced to practice.

Lady Jane asserted that "a woman should always let an attachment come to a declaration, before she permits a man to see her mind, even though determined upon a refusal."

Caroline thought this would be using the man ill.

Lady Jane maintained that it would be using him much worse to refuse him before he asked.

"But without refusing," Caroline said that "a gentleman might be led to perceive when he was not likely to be accepted, and thus would be saved the pain and humiliation of a rejected proposal."

"It was not a young lady's first business to think of that—her first duty was to do what was right and proper for herself," Lady Jane said.

"Certainly; but the very question is, what is right and proper?"

"To give a distinct answer when a distinct question is asked, neither more nor less," said Lady Jane. "Caroline, on these subjects you must trust to one who knows the world, to tell you the opinion of the world. A woman is safe, and cannot be blamed by friend or foe, if she adhere to the plain rule 'Stay till you are asked.' Till a gentleman thinks proper, in form, to declare his attachment, nothing can be more indelicate than for a lady to see it."

"Or, in some cases, more disingenuous, more cruel, than to pretend to be blind to it."

"Cruel!—Cruel is a word of the last century, or the century before the last. Cruelty is never heard of now, my dear—gentlemen's hearts don't break in these our days; or suppose an odd heart should break, if the lady is treating it according to rule, she is not to blame. Why did not the proud tongue speak? Whatever happens, she is acquitted by the world."

"And by her own conscience? Surely not, if she deceive, and injure by deception."

Lady Jane warmly repeated that she knew the world—that at her time of life she ought to know the world—and that she was certain any line of conduct but that which she had pointed out would expose a

woman to the charge of indelicacy, and perhaps of impertinence.

These were heavy charges, Caroline felt; but she thought that, when not deserved, they could be borne better than self-reproaches for the want of candour and truth.

Lady Jane observed that, in the catalogue of female virtues, delicacy must have the foremost place.

Caroline made a distinction between real delicacy and punctilio.

Lady Jane was inclined to call it a distinction without a difference. She, however, more prudently said, that punctilio was necessary as the guard of female delicacy.

Undoubtedly; but the greater virtue should not be sacrificed to the less. Truth and sincerity, Caroline thought, must be classed among the highest virtues of woman, as well as of man, and she hoped they were perfectly consistent with the utmost feminine modesty. She asked whether, after all, the plea of delicacy and punctilio was not sometimes used to conceal the real motives? Perhaps ladies, in pretending to be too delicate to see a gentleman's sentiments, were often, in fact, gratifying their own vanity, and urging him to that declaration which was to complete the female triumph.

Lady Jane grew angry: but fearing lest Caroline should perceive that she had some particular object in view—doubtful whether Caroline knew, or did not know, her aim—and farther, having a secret hope, that, like other young ladies who support fine sentiments about love and generosity, in conversation, she might, when it came to the test, forget them, her ladyship urged her opinion no farther.

Indeed she candidly acknowledged, that much might be said on Caroline's side of the question—and there the matter ended.

Chapter xxvi.

THE object that Lady Jane had in view was to prevent Caroline from discouraging, by premature candour, a passion which she saw rising in the heart of a young nobleman.

Lord William ——,

"Well pleased to 'scape from flattery to wit,"

had always preferred Lady Jane Granville's company to the society of those who courted him more, or with less delicacy. Since Miss Caroline Percy's arrival and appearance in town, Lady Jane had, to do her justice, preserved with his lordship exactly the same even tenor of conduct; whatever her wishes might be, she had too much proper pride to compromise her own or her young friend's dignity. Moreover, her ladyship had sense and knowledge of character sufficient to perceive that such a sacrifice, or the least appearance of a disposition to make it, would be not only degrading, but vain: it would, she knew, for ever disgust and ruin them in the opinion of a man, who had infinitely more penetration and feeling than those who flattered him were aware that he possessed.

Lord William had excellent abilities, knowledge, and superior qualities of every sort, all depressed by excessive timidity, to such a degree as to be almost useless to himself and to others. Whenever he was, either for the business or pleasure of life, to meet or mix with numbers, the whole man was, as it were, snatched from himself. He was subject to that nightmare of the soul, who seats herself upon the human breast, oppresses the heart, palsies the will, and raises spectres of dismay, which the sufferer combats in vain —that cruel enchantress, who hurls her spell even

upon childhood; and, when she makes the youth her victim, pronounces, "Henceforward you shall never appear in your natural character: innocent, you shall look guilty; wise, you shall look silly; never shall you have the use of your natural faculties. That which you wish to say, you shall not say—that which you wish to do, you shall not do: you shall appear reserved when you are enthusiastic, insensible when your heart sinks into melting tenderness. In the presence of those you most wish to please, you shall be most awkward; and when approached by her you love, you shall become lifeless as a statue, under the irresistible spell of *mauvaise honte.*"

Strange that France should give a name to that malady of the mind which she never knew, or of which she knows less than any other nation upon the surface of the civilized globe!

Under the spell of *mauvaise honte* poor Lord William —— laboured—fast bound—and bound the faster by all the efforts made for his relief by the matrons and young damsels who crowded round him continually. They were astonished that all their charms, and all the encouragement they held out, failed to free this young nobleman from his excessive timidity.

"What a pity! it was his only fault, they were sure."—"Ten thousand pities he could not be made to speak—they were certain he had a vast deal to say."—"And he could be so agreeable, they were confident, if he would."—"Most extraordinary that a man of his rank and fortune, whom every creature admired, should be so timid."

True; but the timid Lord William all the time esteemed himself more highly than these ladies who affected to admire him. Mixed with his apparent timidity there was a secret pride. Conscious of the

difference between what he was, and what he appeared to be, he was at once mortified and provoked, and felt disdain and disgust for those who pretended to admire his outward man, or who paid to his fortune that tribute which he thought due to his merit. With some few, some very few, by whom he was appreciated, his pride and his timidity were equally at ease, his reserve vanished in an astonishing manner, and the man came out of the marble. Of this small number in his confidence Lady Jane Granville was one. Even from his boyish years she had discerned his worth and value, and he now distinguished her by his grateful and constant regard. But Lady Jane Granville, though a woman of considerable talents, could not be a judge of the whole of his mind, or the extent of his powers: her talent was chiefly wit—her knowledge, knowledge of the world —her mind cultivated but slightly, and for embellishment—his deeply, extensively, and with large views. When he became acquainted with Miss Caroline Percy, he soon found that to her all this appeared, and by her was justly valued. His assiduity in cultivating his friend Lady Jane's acquaintance increased; and his taste for the conversation at her house became so great, that he was always the first, and usually the last, at her parties. His morning visits were frequent and long; he knew, by instinct, the hours when the two ladies were disengaged, but not always so exactly the time when he ought to take leave. His ear never informed him when Lady Jane's carriage came to the door, nor did he always hear the servant announce its being in readiness. Her ladyship might fidget as much as her politeness would permit without danger of its being observed. His lordship never was wakened to the sense of its being necessary to stir, till Miss Caroline Percy, by some strong indication, such as putting away her drawing, and the books, or by plainly

saying, "We must go out now," made it manifest to him that he must depart. For this Caroline was regularly reproved afterwards by Lady Jane—but she never found that it gave Lord William any offence; nor did she for some time observe that it caused him much disquietude. He seemed to her to stay from mere habitual absence of mind, and unwillingness to remove from a retreat where he was safe and comfortable, to some place where he was liable to be annoyed by his fair persecutors. That he liked her company and conversation she did not affect to deny, nor could she doubt that he felt for her esteem and regard—he expressed both, and he was not a man to express more than he felt, or the truth of whose professions could be suspected; but she thought that his regard for her, and for Lady Jane, were both of the same nature. She thought him *a friend, not a lover*. This was not with Caroline a mere commonplace phrase. She believed this to be true; and at the time she believed it, she was right. But constantly in the society of an amiable, sensible, and beautiful young woman, with a man of feeling, taste, and understanding, whose heart is disengaged, the passage from friendship to love is found so easy and rapid, as to be scarcely perceptible. And to this, which generally happens in similar circumstances, Lord William was peculiarly liable. For though, from the crowds who courted his attention, it might seem that his liberty of choice was unlimited, yet, in fact, his power of choosing was contracted and reduced to the few "whom choice and passion both approve." Among these few his fastidious judgment, and his apprehensions of domestic disquietude, saw frequently, and sometimes too justly, objection to the family connexion of the young lady: some want of union in it—want of principle, or train of dissipation, which he dreaded, or

some folly he disliked; so that among the numbers of his own rank who sought his alliance, it was not easy for him to satisfy himself, even as to connexion—still more difficult to satisfy him as to love, "the modern fair one's jest," or, what is worse, her affectation. His lordship was well aware that among the numbers of young ladies who were ready at a moment's warning to marry him, not one of these would love him for his own sake. Now in common with Marmontel's Alcibiades, and with most men of rank who have any superiority of character, Lord William had an anxious desire to be loved for his own sake; for though, in the opinion of most people of the world, and of some philosophers, the circumstances of rank and fortune form a part of personal merit; yet as these are not indissolubly associated with the individual, he rather preferred affection and esteem arising from merit, of which he could not be deprived by any revolution of fate or turn of fancy. If he was ever loved by Caroline Percy, it would be *for his own sake;* and of the constancy of her affection, if once obtained, the whole tenor of her character and conduct gave him the most secure pledge. Her education, manners, talents, and beauty, were all such as would honour and grace the highest rank of life. She had no fortune—but that was of no consequence to him—he was likely to have a princely income: he had no debts, he had at present all that satisfied his wishes, and that could enable him to live married, as well as single, in a manner that suited his station. His friends, eager to have him marry, and almost despairing of his complying, in this point, with their wishes, left him entirely at liberty in his choice. Reason and passion both determined on that choice, just about the time when English Clay proposed for Caroline, and when the conversation about declarations and refusals had passed

between her and Lady Jane. That conversation, instead of changing or weakening the opinions Caroline then expressed, had confirmed her in her own sentiments, by drawing out more fully the strength of the reasons, and the honourable nature of the feelings, on which they were founded. Some slight circumstances, such as she could scarcely state in words, occurred about this time, which first gave her the idea, that Lord William —— felt for her more than esteem. The tender interest he showed one day when she had a slight indisposition—the extreme alarm he expressed one night when there occurred an embarrassment between their carriages at the door of the opera-house, by which Lady Jane's *vis-à-vis* was nearly overturned —an alarm much greater than Caroline thought the occasion required—was succeeded by anger against his coachman, so much more violent and vehement than the error or offence justified, or than his lordship had ever before been seen to show; these things, which in a man of gallantry might mean nothing but to show his politeness, from Lord William seemed indicative of something more. Caroline began to see that the friend might become a lover, and now, for the first time, questioned her own heart. She thought highly of Lord William's abilities and character—she saw, as she had once said to Lady Jane, "signs which convinced her that this volcano, covered with snow, and often enveloped in clouds, would at some time burst forth in torrents of fire." Little indication as Lord William now showed to common observers of being or of becoming an orator, she perceived in him the soul of eloquence; and she foresaw, that on some great occasion, from some great motive, he would at once vanquish his timidity, and burst forth upon the Senate. She felt convinced that whether eloquent or silent, speaking or acting, in public or private life, Lord

William would in every circumstance of trial fill and sustain the character of an upright, honourable, enlightened English nobleman. Notwithstanding that she thought thus highly of him, Count Altenberg, in her opinion, far surpassed him in the qualities they both possessed, and excelled in many, in which Lord William was deficient—in manner especially; and manner goes a great way in love, even with people of the best understanding. Besides all the advantages of manner, Count Altenberg had far superior talents, or at least far superior habits of conversation—he was altogether as estimable and more agreeable than his rival. He also had had the advantage of finding Caroline's mind disengaged—he had cultivated her society in the country, where he had had time and opportunity to develop his own character and hers—in one word, he had made the first impression on her heart; and such an impression, once made on a heart like hers, cannot be easily effaced. Though there seemed little chance of his returning to claim his place in her affections—though she had made the most laudable efforts to banish him from her recollection, yet—

> " En songeant qu'il faut qu'on l'oublie
> On s'en souvient; "

and now she found, that not only all others compared with him were indifferent to her, but that any, whom she was forced to put in comparison and competition with Count Altenberg, immediately sunk in her opinion.

Thus distinctly knowing her own mind, Caroline was however still in doubt as to Lord William's, and afraid of mistaking the nature of his sentiments. She well remembered Lady Jane's cautions; and though she was fully resolved to spare by her candour the

suspense and pain which coquetry might create and prolong, yet it was necessary to be certain that she read aright, and therefore to wait for something more decisive, by which to interpret his meaning. Lady Jane wisely forbore all observations on the subject, and never said or looked a word that could recall the memory of her former debate. With the most scrupulous, almost haughty delicacy, and the most consummate prudence, she left things to take their course, secure of what the end would be.

One night Lady Jane and Caroline were at a party. When they arrived, they descried Lord William, in the midst of a group of the fair and fashionable, looking as if he was suffering martyrdom. His eye caught Caroline as she passed, and his colour changed. The lady next him put up her glass, to look for the cause of that change—but the glass was put down again, and no apprehensions excited. By degrees, Lord William worked his way towards Caroline—no, not towards Caroline, but to Lady Jane Granville. The company near her were talking of a proposal, which a gentleman had lately made for a celebrated beauty—his suit had been rejected. Some said that the lady must have seen that he was attached to her, and that she had been to blame in allowing him so long to pay her attentions, if she was determined to refuse him at last; others defended the lady, saying that the gentleman had never made a distinct declaration, and that therefore the lady was quite correct in not appearing to know that his attentions meant anything more than was avowed. Lord William listened, perfectly silent, and with an appearance of some anxiety. Lady Jane Granville supported warmly the same side of the question which she had taken in a similar conversation with Caroline.

Miss Percy was appealed to for her opinion,

"Would it not be strange, indeed, if a lady were to reject a gentleman before she was asked?"

Lord William with increasing anxiety listened, but dared not look at Caroline, who with becoming modesty, but with firmness in what she believed to be right, answered, "that if a woman saw that a gentleman loved her, and felt that she could not return his attachment, she might, without any rude or premature rejecting, simply by a certain ease of manner, which every man of sense knows how to interpret, mark the difference between esteem and tenderer sentiments; and might, by convincing him that there was no chance of his obtaining any farther interest in her heart, prevent his ever having the pain of a decided refusal."

The discussion ended here. Fresh company joined them; other subjects were started. Lord William continued silent: he did not take any share in any conversation, but was so absent and absorbed in his own thoughts, that several times he was spoken to, without his being able to gave a plausible answer—then he stood covered with confusion—confusion increasing from the sense that it was observed, and could not be conquered. The company moved different ways, but his lordship continued fixed near Caroline. At last the attention of all near him was happily diverted and drawn away from him by the appearance of some new and distinguished person. He seized the moment, and summoned courage sufficient to address some slight question to Caroline: she answered him with an ease of manner which he felt to be unfavourable to his wishes. The spell was upon him, and he could not articulate—a dead silence might have ensued, but that Lady Jane happily went on saying something about pine-apple ice. Lord William assented implicitly, without knowing to what, and replied, "Just

so—exactly so—" to contradictory assertions; and if he had been asked at this instant whether what he was eating was hot or cold, he could not have been able to decide. Lady Jane composedly took a biscuit, and enjoyed the passing scene, observing that this was the pleasantest party she had been at this season.

Mrs Crabstock came up, and Lady Jane, with wit at will, kept the pattern-lady in play by an opportunely recollected tale of scandal; with ears delighted, eyes riveted, stood Mrs Crabstock, while Lord William, again relieved from the fear of observation, breathed once more; and, partly recovering his senses through the mist that hung over him, looked at Caroline, in hopes of drawing some encouraging omen from her countenance. He had come to this party determined to say something that should explain to her his sentiments. He thought he could speak to her better in a crowd than alone. Now or never! said he to himself. With desperate effort, and with an oppressed voice, he said—the very thing he did not mean to say.

"Miss Percy, I never was so inclined in all my life to quarrel with ease of manner in anybody as in you." Then, correcting himself, and blushing deeply, he added, "I don't mean that I don't admire your ease of manner in general—but—in short, it is impossible, I think, that with your penetration, you can be in any doubt as to my sentiments. If I thought——"

He stopped short: he felt as if his life hung upon a thread—as if the first look, the first sound of her voice, the next word spoken must decide his fate. He longed yet feared to see that look, and to hear that word.

"And I think it is impossible that, with your lordship's penetration, you should mistake mine," said Caroline.

There was an ingenuous sweetness in her look and voice, a fear of giving pain, yet a resolution to be

sincere. Lord William felt and understood it all. He saw there was no hope. Caroline heard from him a deep sigh. With great and painful emotion, in the most calm voice she could command, but in the kindest tone, she added, "For the sentiments of regard and esteem your lordship has expressed for me, believe me, I am truly grateful."

Mrs Crabstock moved toward them, and Caroline paused.

"Are you to be at Lady Arrowsmith's concert to-morrow, my lord?" said Mrs Crabstock, who was now at liberty to ask questions; for even scandal will not hold curiosity in check for ever.

"Are you to be at Lady Arrowsmith's, my lord, to-morrow night?" repeated she, for her first attack was unheard.

"I do not know, indeed," said he, starting from his fit of absence.

Mrs Crabstock persisted. "Were you at the opera last night, my lord?"

"I really, ma'am, do not recollect."

"Bless me!" cried Mrs Crabstock.

And "Bless me!" cried Lady Jane Granville. "We are to be at the Duchess of Greenwich's ball; Caroline, my dear—time for us to move. My lord, might I trouble your lordship to ask if our carriage is to be had?"

Lord William, before she had completed the request, obeyed. As they went down the staircase, Lady Jane laughing said, "I am afraid I shall be as impertinently curious as Mrs Crabstock—I was going to ask your lordship whether you are engaged to-morrow, or whether you can come to us—to me?"

"*Unhappily*," the accent on the word showed it was no expression of course. "Unhappily I cannot—I am engaged—I thank your ladyship."

Lady Jane looked back at Caroline, who was a little behind her.

"Though I could not recollect in time to tell Mrs Crabstock where I was last night, or where I am to be to-morrow," continued his lordship, making an effort to smile, "yet I *can* satisfy your ladyship—I shall be at Tunbridge."

"Tunbridge!" cried Lady Jane, stopping short, and turning to Lord William, as the light shone full on his face: "Tunbridge at this season?"

"All seasons are alike to me—all seasons and their change," replied Lord William, scarcely knowing what he answered—the powers of mind and body engrossed in suppressing emotion.

They had now reached the bottom of the stairs—a shawl of Lady Jane's was not to be found; and while the servants were searching for it, she and Caroline, followed by Lord William, went into one of the supper-rooms, which was open.

"To Tunbridge!" repeated Lady Jane. "No, my lord, you must not leave us."

"What is there to prevent me?" said Lord William hastily, almost harshly; for though at the time he felt her kindness, yet, irresistibly under the power of his demon, he said the thing he did not mean: his voice and look expressed the reverse of what his heart felt.

"Nay, if there is nothing to prevent your lordship," said Lady Jane, walking away with dignity, "I have only to wish your lordship a good journey."

"I would stay, if I could see anything to keep me," said Lord William, impelled, contrary to his better judgment, to appeal once more to Caroline's countenance. Then cursed himself for his weakness.

Lady Jane, turning back, saw his lordship's look; and now, convinced that Caroline was to blame for all,

reproached herself for misinterpreting his words and manner.

"Well, my lord," cried she, "you will not be in such haste to set out for Tunbridge, I am sure, as to go before you hear from me in the morning. Perhaps I may trouble your lordship with some commands."

He bowed, and said he should do himself the honour of waiting her ladyship's commands. She passed on quickly towards the hall. Lord William offered his arm to Caroline.

"I must speak to you, Miss Percy—and have but a moment——"

Caroline walked more slowly.

"Thank you, madam—yes, I *do* thank you. Much pain you have given; but as little as you could. Better now than later. Like yourself—and I thank you for preserving the idea of excellence in my mind in all its integrity—in all——I shall detain you but a moment—you are not impatient?"

"No," said Caroline, in a tremulous voice; yet for his sake, as well as for the sake of her own consistency, trying to suppress emotion which she thought he might misinterpret.

"Fear not—I shall not misinterpret—I know too well what love is. Speak freely of my sentiments to Lady Jane, when I am gone—her friendship deserves it from me."

He stopped speaking. "Stay," said Caroline. "It may give your noble mind some ease to know that my heart was engaged before we ever met."

He was silent. It was the silence of deep feeling. They came within view of the servants—he walked quietly to the carriage—assisted her into it, pressed her hand—and said in a low voice, "Farewell—for ever."

The carriage-door was shut.

"Where to, my lady?" said the footman.

"The Duchess of Greenwich's, or home, Caroline?"

"Oh! home, if I may choose," said Caroline.

"Home!" said Lady Jane.

And the moment the glass was up, "Caroline, my dear, tell me this instant, what is all this between you and Lord William?—Is it as I hope?—or, is it as I fear?—speak."

Caroline could not—she was in tears.

"What have you done?—If you have said anything irrevocable, and without consulting me, I never, never will forgive you, Caroline. Speak, at all events."

Caroline tried to obey her ladyship.

"What have you done? What have you said?"

"I have said the truth—I have done, I hope, what I ought," said Caroline; "but I have given great pain——"

Lady Jane now perceiving by her voice that she was in sorrow, spoke no more in anger; but, checking herself, and changing her tone, said, "It is not irremediable, my dear. Whatever pain you may have given, you know the power to give pleasure is still in your own hands."

Caroline sighed—"Alas! no, madam, it is not."

"Why so, my love? He will not leave town in the morning without my commands; and I am at your command. A note, a line, a word, will set all to rights."

"But that word I *cannot* say."

"Then let me say it for you. Trust your delicacy to me—I will be dignity itself. Can you doubt it? Believe me, much as I wish to see you what and where you ought to be in society, I would not——there it is, begging Lady Frances Arlington's pardon, that Mrs Falconer and I differ in character essentially and *de fond en comble*. I would never yield a point of real

delicacy; I would not descend the thousandth part of a degree from proper dignity, to make you—any more than to make myself—a princess. And now, without reserve, open your heart, and tell me what you wish to have done or said."

"Nothing, my dear Lady Jane."

"Nothing? my dear Caroline."

"I have no more to say—I have said all I can say."

The carriage stopped at their own door.

"We are all in the dark," said Lady Jane: "when I have more light, I shall be able better to tell what we are about."

"Now I can see as well as hear," continued she, as her woman met her with lights. "Keppel, you may go to bed: we shall not want you to-night."

"Now, Caroline, take care: remember your countenance is open to me, if not your heart."

"Both, both are open to you, my dear friend!" cried Caroline. "And Lord William, who said you deserved it from him, desired me to speak as freely for him as for myself."

"He's a noble creature! There's the difference between reserve of character and reserve of manner—I always said so. Go on, my dear."

Caroline related everything that had passed; and Lady Jane, when she had finished, said, "A couple of children!—But a couple of charming children. Now I, that have common sense, must set it all to rights, and turn *no* prettily into *yes*."

"It cannot be done," said Caroline.

"Pardon me, solemn fair one, it can."

"Pardon me, my dear Lady Jane, it must not be done."

"Children should not say *must*," cried Lady Jane, in a playful tone; for never did she feel in more de-

lightful spirits than this moment, when all her hopes for Caroline, as she thought, were realized; "and to complete '*the pleasing history*,' no obstacle remained," she said, "but the Chinese mother-of-pearl curtain of etiquette to be withdrawn, by a dexterous delicate hand, from between Shuey-Ping-Sin and her lover." Lady Jane, late as it was at night, took up a pen, to write a note to Lord William.

"What are you going to do, may I ask, my dear madam?" cried Caroline.

"My dear madam, I am going my own way—let me alone."

"But if you mean to write for me——"

"For you!—not at all—for myself. I beg to see Lord William in the morning, to trouble him with my commands."

"But seriously, my dear Lady Jane, do not give him unnecessary pain—for my mind is decided."

"So every young lady says—it is a ruled case—for the first three days." Lady Jane wrote on as fast as she could.

"My dear Lady Jane," cried Caroline, stopping her ladyship's hand, "I am in earnest."

"So, then," cried Lady Jane impatiently, "you will not trust me—you will not open your heart to me, Caroline?"

"I do—I have trusted you entirely, my dear friend. My heart I opened to you long ago."

A dead pause—and blank consternation in Lady Jane's countenance.

"But surely since then it must have changed?"

"Not in the least."

"But it will change: let Lord William try to change it."

Caroline shook her head. "It will not—I cannot."

"And you won't do this, when I ask it as a favour for my friend, my particular friend?"

"Excuse me, dear, kind Lady Jane; I know you wish only my happiness, but this would make me unhappy. It is the only thing you could ask with which I would not comply."

"Then I'll never ask anything else while I live from you, Miss Percy," cried Lady Jane, rising and throwing her pen from her. "You are resolved to throw your happiness from you—do so. Wish your happiness!—yes, I have wished it anxiously—ardently! but now I have done: you are determined to be perverse and philosophical. Good night to you."

Lady Jane snatched up her candle, and in haste retired. Caroline, sensible that all her ladyship's anger at this moment arose from warm affection, was the more sorry to have occasioned it, and to feel that she could not, by yielding, allay it instantly.——A sleepless night.

Early in the morning, Keppel, half-dressed and not half-awake, came, with her ladyship's love, and begged to speak a word to Miss Percy.

"*Love!*" repeated Caroline, as she went to Lady Jane's apartment: "how kind she is!"

"My dear, you have not slept, I see—nor I neither; but I am sure you have forgiven my hastiness;" said Lady Jane, raising herself on her pillow.

Caroline kissed her affectionately.

"And let these tears, my dearest Caroline," continued Lady Jane, "be converted into tears of joy: for my sake—for your whole family—for your own sake, my sweet girl, be advised, and don't throw away your happiness for life. Here's a note from Lord William—he waits my commands—that's all. Let me only desire to see him."

"On my account? I cannot," said Caroline—

the tears streaming down her face, though she spoke calmly.

"Then it is your pride to refuse the man for whom every other young woman is sighing."

"No, believe me that I do not act from pride: I feel none—I have no reason to feel any."

"No reason to feel pride! Don't you know—yes, you know as well as I do, that this is the man of men—the man on whom every mother's—every daughter's eye is fixed—the first unmarried nobleman now in England—the prize of prizes. The most excellent man, you allow, and universally allowed to be the most agreeable."

"But if he be not so to me?" said Caroline.

"That can only be because—you are conscious of the cause, Caroline—it is your own fault."

"And therefore I said, that I felt I had no reason to be proud," said Caroline.

"Then have reason to be proud; conquer this weakness, and then you may have cause to be proud. You pique yourself on being reasonable: is it reasonable to leave your affections in the possession of a man, of whom, in all human probability, you will never hear more?"

"Too probable," said Caroline.

"And will you, you, Caroline Percy, like Lady Angelica Headingham, leave your heart at the mercy of a foreign *adventurer?*"

"Oh! stop, ma'am," cried Caroline, putting her hand before Lady Jane's mouth: "don't say that word—anything else I could bear. But if you knew him—education, character, manners—no, you would not be so unjust."

"You know you told me you were sensible you ought not to indulge such a weakness, Caroline?"

"I did—I am sensible of it—oh! you see I am;

and my best—my very best have I done to drive him from my memory; and never, till I was forced to make this comparison, did I recollect—did I feel——Weak, I may be," said Caroline, changing from great agitation to perfect decision; "but wicked I will not be: I will never marry one man, and love another. My own happiness if I sacrifice, mine be the consequence; but I will never injure the happiness of another. Do not, madam, keep that noble heart, this excellent Lord William, in suspense—What are your commands?"

"My commands!" cried Lady Jane, raising her voice, trembling with anger. "Then this is your gratitude—this your generosity!"

"I cannot be generous—I must be just. I have concealed nothing from Lord William—he knows that my heart was engaged before we met."

"And this your affection for all your friends—all who wish for your happiness? You would sacrifice nothing—nothing—no, not the slightest fancy, disgraceful fancy of your own, to please them, when you know how ardently too they wish to see you happily married."

"To marry to please others, against my own inclination, against my own conscience, must be weakness indeed—self-deception; for if my friends wish my happiness, and I make myself miserable, how can that please them? Any sacrifice I could make, except that of principle, I would; but that I never will make, nor will my friends, nor do they, desire it——Forgive me, dear Lady Jane."

"I never will forgive you," interrupted Lady Jane. "Ring!—yes, ring the bell—and when rung, never expect my forgiveness."

It must be done, thought Caroline, sooner or later.

"My compliments, Keppel, to Lord William," said

Lady Jane; "I have no commands to trouble him with. Stay, I must find something—that parcel for Mrs Baggot, Tunbridge——I must write—I cannot write."

With great difficulty, in the agitation of her mind and hand, Lady Jane wrote a few lines, and holding the note up, looked at Caroline—a last appeal—in vain.

"Take it, Keppel—I'm sorry Lord William's servant has been kept waiting," cried her ladyship, and suddenly closed the curtain. Caroline retired softly, hoping that Lady Jane might sleep, and sleep off her anger; but no—the morning passed—the day passed—and the sun went down upon her wrath. At night she would not, she could not, go out anywhere. Caroline, alone with her, endured a terrible tête-à-tête. Lady Jane never spoke. Caroline tried all she could, by affectionate kindness of look and voice, and by contrite gentleness, to soothe her perturbed spirit. Lady Jane's anger admitted of no alleviation: her disappointment increased the more she reflected, and the more she thought of what others would think, if they could know it. And that they did not know, might never know it (for Lady Jane was too honourable to betray Lord William's secret) was an additional mortification. It was not till after ninety-six hours that Caroline perceived in her ladyship any change for the better. The first favourable symptom was her giving vent to her natural feelings in the following broken sentences: "After all my pains! When I was just thinking of writing to your father—when I might have carried you home in triumph, Lady William! A duke in all human probability—a duchess—absolutely a duchess you might have been! And such a well-informed—such an amiable man!—everything your own family could have wished——And Rosamond! Ah! poor

Rosamond—Rosamond, you little know!——And nobody will ever know—no creature will ever be a bit the wiser. If you would have let him even come to a declaration—properly, decently to a declaration—let him attend you in public once or twice, your declared admirer—what harm could it possibly have done him, you, or anybody? Then there would have been some credit, at least—and some comfort to me. But now, at the end of the campaign, just where we were before! The season over, under Lady Jane Granville's *chaperonage*, the beautiful Miss Caroline Percy has received one proposal and a quarter!——No, while I live, I will never forgive it."

Chapter xxvi.

NO less an event than Alfred's marriage, no event calling less imperatively upon her feelings, could have recovered Lady Jane's sympathy for Caroline. But Alfred Percy, who had been the restorer of her fortune, her friend in adversity, what pain it would give him to find her, at the moment when he might expect her congratulations, quarrelling with his sister—that sister, too, who had left her home, where she was so happy, and Hungerford Castle, where she was adored, on purpose to tend Lady Jane in sickness and obscurity!

Without being put exactly into these words, or, perhaps, into any words, thoughts such as these, with feelings of gratitude and affection, revived for Caroline in Lady Jane's mind the moment she heard of Alfred's intended marriage.

"Good young man!—Excellent friend!—Well, tell me all about it, *my dear*."

It was the first time that her ladyship had said *my dear* to Caroline since the day of the fatal refusal.

Caroline was touched by this word of reconciliation —and the tears it brought into her eyes completely overcame Lady Jane, who hastily wiped her own.

"So, my dear Caroline—where were we? Tell me about your brother's marriage—when is it to be? —How has it been brought about?—The last I heard of the Leicesters was the good dean's death—I remember pitying them very much——Were they not left in straitened circumstances, too? Will Alfred have any fortune with Miss Leicester?—Tell me everything—read me his letters."

To go back to Dr Leicester's death. For some months his preferments were kept in abeyance. Many were named, or thought of, as likely to succeed him. The deanery was in the gift of the Crown, and, as it was imagined that the vicarage was also at the disposal of Government, applications had poured in, on all sides, for friends, and friends' friends, to the remotest link of the supporters of ministry——But— to use their own elegant phrase—the hands of Government were tied.

It seems that in consequence of some Parliamentary interest, formerly given opportunely, and in consideration of certain arrangements in his diocese, to serve persons whom ministers were obliged to oblige, a promise had long ago been given to Bishop Clay that his recommendation to the deanery should be accepted on the next vacancy. The bishop, who had promised the living to his sister's husband, now presented it to Mr Buckhurst Falconer, with the important addition of Dr Leicester's deanery.

To become a dean was once the height of Buckhurst's ambition, that for which in a moment of elation he prayed, scarcely hoping that his wishes

would ever be fulfilled: yet now that his wish was accomplished, and that he had attained this height of his ambition, was he happy? No! far from it; farther than ever. How could he be happy—dissatisfied with his conduct, and detesting his wife? In the very act of selling himself to this beldam, he abhorred his own meanness; but he did not know how much reason he should have to repent, till the deed was done. It was done in a hurry, with all the precipitation of a man who hates himself for what he feels forced to do. Unused to bargain and sale in any way, in marriage never having thought of it before, Buckhurst did not take all precautions necessary to make his sacrifice answer his own purpose. He could not conceive the avaricious temper and habits of his lady, till he was hers past redemption. Whatever accession of income he obtained from his marriage, he lived up to; immediately, his establishment, his expences, surpassed his revenue. His wife would not pay or advance a shilling beyond her stipulated quota to their domestic expences. He could not bear the parsimonious manner in which she would have had him live, or the shabby style in which she received his friends. He was more profuse in proportion as she was more niggardly; and whilst she scolded and grudged every penny she paid, he ran in debt magnanimously for hundreds. When the living and the deanery came into his possession, the second year's fruits had been eaten beforehand. Money he must have, and money his wife would not give—but a litigious agent suggested to him a plan for raising it, by demanding a considerable sum from the executors of the late Dr Leicester, for what is called *dilapidation*. The parsonage-house seemed to be in good repair; but to make out charges of dilapidation was not difficult to those who understood

the business — and fifteen hundred pounds was the charge presently made out against the executors of the late incumbent. It was invidious, it was odious for the new vicar, in the face of his parishioners, of all those who loved and respected his predecessor, to begin by making such a demand—especially as it was well known that the late dean had not saved any of the income of his preferment, but had disposed of it amongst his parishioners as a steward for the poor. He had left his family in narrow circumstances. They were proud of his virtues, and not ashamed of the consequences. With dignity and ease they retrenched their expences; and after having lived as became the family of a dignitary of the Church, on quitting the parsonage, the widow and her niece retired to a small habitation, suited to their altered circumstances, and lived with respectable and respected economy. The charge brought against them by the new dean was an unexpected blow. It was an extortion, to which Mrs Leicester would not submit—could not without injury to her niece, from whose fortune the sum claimed, if yielded, must be deducted.

Alfred Percy, from the first moment of their distress, from the time of good Dr Leicester's death, has been assiduous in his attentions to Mrs Leicester; and by the most affectionate letters, and, whenever he could get away from London, by his visits to her and to his Sophia, had proved the warmth and constancy of his attachment. Some months had now passed—he urged his suit, and besought Sophia no longer to delay his happiness. Mrs Leicester wished that her niece should now give herself a protector and friend, who might console her for the uncle she had lost. It was at this period the *dilapidation charge* was made. Mrs Leicester laid the whole statement before Alfred,

declaring that for his sake, as well as for her niece's, she was resolute to defend herself against injustice. Alfred could scarcely bring himself to believe that Buckhurst Falconer had acted in the manner represented, with a rapacity, harshness, and cruelty, so opposite to his natural disposition. Faults Alfred well knew that Buckhurst had; but they were all, he thought, of quite a different sort from those of which he now stood accused. What was to be done? Alfred was extremely averse from going to law with a man who was his relation, for whom he had early felt, and still retained, a considerable regard: yet he could not stand by and see the woman he loved defrauded of nearly half the small fortune she possessed. On the other hand, he was employed as a professional man, and called upon to act. He determined, however, before he should, as a last resource, expose the truth and maintain the right in a court of justice, previously to try every means of conciliation in his power. To all his letters the new dean answered evasively and unsatisfactorily, by referring him to his attorney, into whose hands he said he had put the business, and he knew and wished to hear nothing more about it. The attorney, solicitor Sharpe, was impracticable—Alfred resolved to see the dean himself; and this, after much difficulty, he at length effected. He found the dean and his lady tête-à-tête. Their raised voices suddenly stopped short as he entered. The dean gave an angry look at his servant as Alfred came into the room.

"Your servants," said Alfred, "told me that you were not at home, but I told them that I knew the dean would be at home to an old friend."

"You are very good—(said Buckhurst)—you do me a great deal of honour," said the dean.

Two different manners appeared in the same person:

one natural—belonging to his former; the other assumed, proper, as he thought, for his present self, or rather for his present situation.

"Won't you be seated? I hope all our friends——" Mrs Buckhurst, or, as she was called, Mrs Dean Falconer, made divers motions, with a very ugly chin, and stood as if she thought there ought to be an introduction. The dean knew it, but being ashamed to introduce her, determined against it. Alfred stood in suspension, waiting their mutual pleasure.

"Won't you sit down, sir?" repeated the dean.

Down plumped Mrs Falconer directly, and taking out her spectacles, as if to shame her husband, by heightening the contrast of youth and age, deliberately put them on; then drawing her table nearer, settled herself to her work.

Alfred, who saw it to be necessary, determined to use his best address to conciliate the lady.

"Mr Dean, you have never yet done me the honour to introduce me to Mrs Falconer."

"I thought—I thought we had met before—since ——Mrs Falconer, Mr Alfred Percy."

The lady took off her spectacles, smiled, and adjusted herself, evidently with an intention to be more agreeable. Alfred sat down by her work-table, directed his conversation to her, and soon talked, or rather induced her to talk herself into fine humour. Presently she retired to dress for dinner, and "hoped Mr Alfred Percy had no intention of running away—*she* had a well-aired bed to offer him."

The dean, though he cordially hated his lady, was glad, for his own sake, to be relieved from her fits of crossness; and was pleased by Alfred's paying attention to her, as this was a sort of respect to himself, and what he seldom met with from those young men who had been his companions before his marriage—they

usually treated his lady with a neglect or ridicule which reflected certainly upon her husband.

Alfred never yet had touched upon his business, and Buckhurst began to think this was merely a friendly visit. Upon Alfred's observing some alteration which had been lately made in the room in which they were sitting, the dean took him to see other improvements in the house; in pointing out these, and all the conveniences and elegancies about the parsonage, Buckhurst totally forgot the *dilapidation suit;* and everything he showed and said tended unawares to prove that the house was in the most perfect repair and best condition possible. Gradually, whatever solemnity and beneficed pomp there had at first appeared in the dean's manner, wore off, or was laid aside; and, except his being somewhat more corpulent and rubicund than in early years, he appeared like the original Buckhurst. His gaiety of heart, indeed, was gone, but some sparkles of his former spirits remained.

"Here," said he, showing Alfred into his study, "here, as our good friend Mr *Blank* said, when he showed us his study, '*Here* is *where* I read all day long—quite snug—and nobody's a bit the wiser for it.'"

The dean seated himself in his comfortable armchair.

"Try that chair, Alfred, excellent for sleeping in at one's ease."

"To rest the cushion and soft dean invite."

"Ah!" said Alfred, "often have I sat in this room with my excellent friend, Dr Leicester!"

The new dean's countenance suddenly changed: but endeavouring to pass it off with a jest, he said, "Ay, poor good old Leicester, he sleeps for ever—

that's one comfort—to me—if not to you." But perceiving that Alfred continued to look serious, the dean added some more proper reflections in a tone of ecclesiastical sentiment, and with a sigh of decorum—then rose, for he smelt that the *dilapidation suit* was coming.

"Would not you like, Mr Percy, to wash your hands before dinner?"

"I thank you, Mr Dean, I must detain you a moment to speak to you on business."

Black as Erebus grew the face of the dean—he had no resource but to listen, for he knew it would come after dinner, if it did not come now; and it was as well to have it alone in the study, where nobody might be a bit the wiser.

When Alfred had stated the whole of what he had to say, which he did in as few and strong words as possible, appealing to the justice and feelings of Buckhurst—to the fears which the dean must have of being exposed, and ultimately defeated in a court of justice —"Mrs Leicester," concluded he, "is determined to maintain the suit, and has employed me to carry it on for her."

"I should very little have expected," said the dean, "that Mr Alfred Percy would have been employed in such a way against me."

"Still less should I have expected that I could be called upon in such a way against you," replied Alfred. "No one can feel it more than I do. The object of my present visit is to try whether some accommodation may not be made, which will relieve us both from the necessity of going to law, and may prevent me from being driven to the performance of this most painful professional duty."

"Duty! professional duty!" repeated Buckhurst: "as if I did not understand all those *cloak-words*, and

know how easy it is to put them on and off at pleasure!"

"To some it may be, but not to me," said Alfred calmly.

Anger started into Buckhurst's countenance, but conscious how inefficacious it would be, and how completely he had laid himself open, the dean answered, "You are the best judge, sir. But I trust—though I don't pretend to understand the honour of lawyers—I trust as a gentleman, you will not take advantage against me in this suit, of anything my openness has shown you about the parsonage."

"You trust rightly, Mr Dean," replied Alfred in his turn, with a look not of anger, but of proud indignation; "you trust rightly, Mr Dean, and as I should have expected that one who has had opportunities of knowing me so well ought to trust."

"That's a clear answer," said Buckhurst. "But how could I tell?—so much *jockeying* goes on in every profession—how could I tell that a lawyer would be more conscientious than another man? But now you assure me of it—I take it upon your word, and believe it in your case. About the accommodation—*accommodation* means money, does not it?—frankly, I have not a shilling. But Mrs Falconer is all *accommodation*. Try what you can do with her—and by the way you began, I should hope you would do a great deal," added he, laughing.

Alfred would not undertake to speak to his lady, unless the dean would, in the first instance, make some sacrifice. He represented that he was not asking for money, but for a relinquishment of a claim, which he apprehended not to be justly due: "And the only use I shall ever make of what you have shown me here is to press upon your feelings, as I do at this moment, the conviction of the injustice of that claim, which I

am persuaded your lawyers only instigated, and that you will abandon."

Buckhurst begged him not to be persuaded of any such thing. The instigation of an attorney, he laughing said, was not in law counted the instigation of the devil—at law no man talked of feelings. In matters of property judges did not understand them, whatever figure they might make with a jury in criminal cases—with an eloquent advocate's hand on his breast.

Alfred let Buckhurst go on with his vain wit and gay rhetoric till he had nothing more to say, knowing that he was hiding consciousness of unhandsome conduct. Sticking firmly to his point, Alfred showed that his client, though gentle, was resolved, and that, without Buckhurst yielded, law must take its course—that though he should never give any hint, the premises must be inspected, and disgrace and defeat must follow.

Forced to be serious, fretted and hurried, for the half-hour bell before dinner had now rung, and the dean's stomach began to know canonical hours, he exclaimed, "The upshot of the whole business is, that Mr Alfred Percy is in love, I understand, with Miss Sophia Leicester, and this fifteen hundred pounds, which he pushes me to the bare wall to relinquish, is eventually as part of her fortune to become his. Would it not have been as fair to have stated this at once?"

"No—because it would not have been the truth."

"No!—You won't deny that you are in love with Miss Leicester?"

"I am as much in love as man can be with Miss Leicester; but her fortune is nothing to me, for I shall never touch it."

"Never touch it! Does the aunt—the widow—the cunning widow, refuse consent?"

"Far from it: the aunt is all the aunt of Miss

Leicester should be—all the widow of Dr Leicester ought to be. But her circumstances are not what they ought to be; and by the liberality of a friend, who lends me a house, rent free, and by the resources of my profession, I am better able than Mrs Leicester is to spare fifteen hundred pounds: therefore, in the recovery of this money I have no personal interest at present. I shall never receive it from her."

"Noble! noble!—just what I could have done myself—once! What a contrast!"

Buckhurst laid his head down upon his arms flat on the table, and remained for some moments silent—then, starting upright, "I'll never claim a penny from her—I'll give it all up to you! I will, if I sell my band for it, by Jove!"

"Oh! what has your father to answer for, who forced you into the Church!" thought Alfred.

"My dear Buckhurst," said he, "my dear Dean—"

"Call me Buckhurst, if you love me."

"I do love you, it is impossible to help it, in spite of——"

"All my faults—say it out—say it out—in spite of your conscience," added Buckhurst, trying to laugh.

"Not in spite of my conscience, but in favour of yours," said Alfred, "against whose better dictates you have been compelled all your life to act."

"I have so, but that's over. What remains to be done at present? I am in real distress for five hundred pounds. Apropos to your being engaged in this dilapidation suit, you can speak to Mrs Falconer about it. Tell her I have given up the thing; and see what she will do."

Alfred promised he would speak to Mrs Falconer.

"And, Alfred, when you see your sister Caroline, tell her that I am not in one sense such a wretch—quite, as she thinks me. But tell her that I am yet a greater

wretch—infinitely more miserable than she, I hope, can conceive—beyond redemption—beyond endurance miserable." He turned away hastily in an agony of mind. Alfred shut the door and escaped, scarcely able to bear his own emotion.

When they met at dinner, Mrs Dean Falconer was an altered person—her unseemly morning costume and well-worn shawl being cast aside, she appeared in bloom-coloured gossamer gauze, and primrose ribbons, a would-be-young lady. Nothing of that curmudgeon look, or old fairy cast of face and figure, to which he had that morning been introduced, but in their place smiles, and all the false brilliancy which rouge can give to the eyes, proclaimed a determination to be charming.

The dean was silent, and scarcely ate anything; though the dinner was excellent, for his lady was skilled in the culinary department, and in favour of Alfred had made a more hospitable display than she usually condescended to make for her husband's friends. There were no other guests, except a young lady, companion to Mrs Falconer. Alfred was as agreeable and entertaining as circumstances permitted; and Mrs Buckhurst Falconer, as soon as she got out of the dining-room, even before she reached the drawing-room, pronounced him to be a most polite and accomplished young man, very different indeed from the *common run*, or the usual style, of Mr Dean Falconer's dashing bachelor beaux, who in her opinion were little better than brute bears.

At coffee, when the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing-room, as Alfred was standing beside Mrs Falconer, meditating how and when to speak of the object of his visit, she cleared the ground by choosing the topic of conversation, which at last fairly drove her husband out of the room. She judiciously, maliciously,

or accidentally, began to talk of the proposal which she had heard a near relation of hers had not long since made to a near relation of Mr Alfred Percy's—Mr Clay, of Clay Hall, her nephew, had proposed for Mr Alfred's sister, Miss Caroline Percy. She was really sorry the match was not to take place, for she had heard a very high character of the young lady in every way, and her nephew was rich enough to do without fortune—not but what that would be very acceptable to all men—especially young men, who are now mostly all for money instead of all for love—except in the case of very first-rate extraordinary beauty, which therefore making a woman a prey just as much one as the other, might be deemed a misfortune as great, though hardly *quite*, Mrs Buckhurst said, as she had found a great fortune in her own particular case. The involution of meaning in these sentences rendering it not easy to be comprehended, the dean stood it pretty well, only stirring his coffee, and observing that it was cold; but when his lady went on to a string of interrogatories about Miss Caroline Percy—on the colour of her eyes and hair—size of her mouth and nose—requiring, in short, a complete full-length portrait of the young lady, poor Buckhurst set down his cup, and pleading business in his study, left the field open to Alfred.

"Near-sighted glasses! Do you never use them, Mr Percy?" said Mrs Dean Falconer, as she thought Alfred's eyes fixed upon her spectacles, which lay on the table.

No—he never used them, he thanked her: he was rather far-sighted than short-sighted. She internally commended his politeness in not taking them up to verify her assertion, and put them into her pocket to avoid all future danger.

He saw it was a favourable moment, and entered at once into his business—beginning by observing that the

dean was much out of spirits. The moment money was touched upon, the curmudgeon look returned upon the lady; and for some time Alfred had great difficulty in making himself heard: she poured forth such complaints against the extravagance of the dean, with lists of the debts she had paid, the sums she had given, and the vow she had made never to go beyond the weekly allowance she had at the last settlement agreed to give her husband.

Alfred pleaded strongly the expence of law, and the certainty, in his opinion, of ultimate defeat, with the being obliged to pay all the costs, which would fall upon the dean. The dean was willing to withdraw his claim—he had promised to do so, in the most handsome manner; and therefore, Alfred said, he felt particularly anxious that he should not be distressed for five hundred pounds, a sum for which he knew Mr Falconer was immediately pressed. He appealed to Mrs Falconer's generosity. He had been desired by the dean to speak to her on the subject, otherwise he should not have presumed—and it was as a professional man, and a near relation, that he now took the liberty: this was the first transaction he had ever had with her, and he hoped he should leave the vicarage impressed with a sense of her generosity, and enabled to do her justice in the opinion of those who did not know her.

That was very little to her, she bluntly said—she acted only up to her own notions—she lived only for herself.

"And for her husband." Love, Alfred Percy said, he was assured, was superior to money in her opinion. "And after all, my dear madam, you set me the example of frankness, and permit me to speak to you without reserve. What can you, who have no reason, you say, to be pleased with either of your nephews,

do better with your money, than spend it while you live, and for yourself, in securing happiness in the gratitude and affection of a husband, who, generous himself, will be peculiarly touched and attached by generosity?"

The words, *love*, *generosity*, *generous*, sounded upon the lady's ear, and she was unwilling to lose that high opinion which she imagined Alfred entertained of her sentiments and character. Besides, she was conscious that he was in fact nearer the truth than all the world would have believed. Avaricious in trifles, and parsimonious in those every-day habits which brand the reputation immediately with the fault of avarice, this woman was one of those misers who can be generous by fits and starts, and who have been known to *give* hundreds of pounds, but never without reluctance would part with a shilling.

She presented the dean, her husband, with an order on her banker for the money he wanted, and Alfred had the pleasure of leaving his unhappy friend better, at least, than he found him. He rejoiced in having compromised this business so successfully, and in thus having prevented the litigation, ill-will, and disgraceful circumstances, which, without his interference, must have ensued.

The gratitude of Mrs Leicester and her niece was delightful. The aunt urged him to accept what he had been the means of saving, as part of her niece's fortune; but this he absolutely refused, and satisfied Mrs Leicester's delicacy, by explaining, that he could not, if he would, now yield to her entreaties, as he had actually obtained the money from poor Buckhurst's generous repentance, upon the express faith that he had no private interest in the accommodation.

"You would not," said Alfred, "bring me under the Act against raising money upon false pretences?"

What Alfred lost in money he gained in love. His Sophia's eyes beamed upon him with delight. The day was fixed for their marriage, and at Alfred's suggestion, Mrs Leicester consented, painful as it was, in some respects, to her feelings, that they should be married by the dean in the parish church.

Alfred brought his bride to town, and as soon as they were established in their own house, or rather in that house which Mr Gresham insisted upon their calling their own, Lady Jane Granville was the first person to offer her congratulations.—Alfred begged his sister Caroline from Lady Jane, as he had already obtained his father's and mother's consent. Lady Jane was really fond of Caroline's company, and had forgiven her, as well as she could; yet her ladyship had no longer a hope of being *of use* to her, and felt that even if any other offer were to occur—and none such as had been made could evermore be expected—it would lead only to fresh disappointment and altercation; therefore she, with the less reluctance, relinquished Caroline altogether.

Caroline's new sister had been, from the time they were first acquainted, her friend, and she rejoiced in seeing all her hopes for her brother's happiness accomplished by this marriage. His Sophia had those habits of independent occupation which are essential to the wife of a professional man, and which enable her to spend cheerfully many hours alone, or at least without the company of her husband. On his return home every evening, he was sure to find a smiling wife, a sympathizing friend, a cheerful fireside.—She had musical talents—her husband was fond of music; and she did not lay aside the accomplishments which had charmed the lover, but made use of them to please him whom she had chosen as her companion for life. Her voice, her harp, her utmost skill, were ready at

any moment; and she found far more delight in devoting her talents to him than she had ever felt in exhibiting them to admiring auditors. This was the domestic use of accomplishments to which Caroline had always been accustomed; so that joining in her new sister's occupations and endeavours to make Alfred's evenings pass pleasantly, she felt at once as much *at home* as if she had been in the country; for the mind is its own place, and domestic happiness may be naturalized in a capital city.

At her brother's house, Caroline had an opportunity of seeing a society that was new to her, that of the professional men of the first eminence both in law and medicine, the men of science and of literature, with whom Alfred and Erasmus had been for years assiduously cultivating acquaintance. They were now happy to meet at Alfred's house, for they liked and esteemed him, and they found his wife and sister sensible, well-informed women, to whom their conversation was of real amusement and instruction; and who, in return, knew how to enliven their leisure hours by female sprightliness and elegance. Caroline now saw the literary and scientific world to the best advantage: not the amateurs, or the mere *show* people, but those who, really excelling and feeling their own superiority, had too much pride, and too little time, to waste upon idle flattery, or what to them were stupid, uninteresting *parties*. Those who refused to go to Lady Spilsbury's, or to Lady Angelica Headingham's, or who were seen there, perhaps, once or twice in a season as a great favour and honour, would call three or four evenings every week at Alfred's.

The first news, the first hints of discoveries, inventions, and literary projects, she heard from time to time discussed. Those men of talents, whom she had heard were to be seen at *conversaziones*, or of whom she

had had a glimpse in fine society, now appeared in a new point of view, and to the best advantage; without those pretensions and rivalships with which they sometimes are afflicted in public, or those affectations and singularities which they often are supposed to assume, to obtain notoriety among persons inferior to them in intellect and superior in fashion. Instead of playing, as they sometimes did, a false game to amuse the multitude, they were obliged now to exert their real skill, and play fair with one another.

Sir James Harrington tells us that in his days the courtiers, who played at divers games in public, had a way of exciting the admiration and amazement of the commoner sort of spectators, by producing heaps of golden counters, and seeming to stake immense sums, when all the time they had previously agreed among one another, that each guinea should stand for a shilling, or each hundred guineas for one: so that in fact two modes of calculation were used for the initiated and uninitiated; and this exoteric practice goes on continually to this hour among literary performers in the intellectual as well as among courtiers in the fashionable world.

Besides the pleasure of studying celebrated characters, and persons of eminent merit, at their ease and at her own, Caroline had now opportunities of seeing most of those objects of rational curiosity, which with Lady Jane Granville had been prohibited as—*mauvais ton*. With men of sense she found it was not *mauvais ton* to use her eyes for the purposes of instruction or entertainment.

With Mrs Alfred Percy she saw everything in the best manner: in the company of well-informed guides, who were able to point out what was essential to be observed; ready to explain and to illustrate; to procure for them all those privileges and advantages as

spectators, which common gazers are denied, and which liberal and enlightened men are ever not only ready to allow, but eager to procure for intelligent unassuming females.

Among the gentlemen of learning, talents, and eminence in Alfred's own profession, whom Caroline had the honour of seeing at her brother's, were Mr Friend, the *friend* of his early years at the bar; and that great luminary, who in a higher orbit had cheered and guided him in his ascent. The Chief-Justice was in a station, and of an age, where praise can be conferred without impropriety, and without hurting the feelings of delicacy or pride. He knew how to praise—a difficult art, but he excelled in it. As Caroline once, in speaking of him, said, "Common compliments, compared to praise from him, are as common coin compared to a medal struck and appropriated for the occasion."

About this time Mr Temple came to tell Alfred, that a ship had been actually ordered to be in readiness to carry him on his intended embassy; that Mr Shaw had recovered; that Cunningham Falconer had no more excuses or pretences for delay; despatches, the last Lord Oldborough said he should ever receive from him as envoy, had now arrived, and Temple was to have set out immediately; but that the whole embassy had been delayed, because Lord Oldborough had received a letter from Count Altenberg, giving an account of alarming revolutionary symptoms, which had appeared in the capital, and in the provinces, in the dominions of his sovereign. Lord Oldborough had shown Mr Temple what related to public affairs, but had not put the whole letter into his hands. All that he could judge from what he read was, that the count's mind was most seriously occupied with the dangerous state of public affairs in his country. "I should have thought," added Mr Temple, "that the whole of this

communication was entirely of a political nature, but that in the last page which Lord Oldborough put into my hand, the catch-words at the bottom were *Countess Christina.*"

Alfred observed, "that, without the aid of Rosamond's imagination to supply something more, nothing could be made of this. However, it was a satisfaction to have had direct news of Count Altenberg."

The next day Mr Temple came for Alfred. Lord Oldborough desired to see him.

"Whatever his business may be, I am sure it is important and interesting," said Mr Temple; "by this time I ought to be well acquainted with Lord Oldborough—I know the signs of his suppressed emotion, and I have seldom seen him put such force upon himself to appear calm, and to do the business of the day, before he should yield his mind to what pressed on his secret thoughts."

Chapter xxxvij.

WHEN Alfred arrived, Lord Oldborough was engaged with some gentlemen from the city about a loan. By the length of time which the negotiators staid, they tried Alfred's patience; but the minister sat with immovable composure, till they knew their own minds, and till they departed. Then, the loan at once dismissed from his thoughts, he was ready for Alfred.

"You have married, I think, Mr Alfred Percy, since I saw you last—I congratulate you."

His lordship was not in the habit of noticing such common events; Alfred was surprised and obliged by the interest in his private affairs which this congratulation denoted.

"I congratulate you, sir, because I understand you have married a woman of sense. To marry a fool—to form or to have any connexion with a fool," continued his lordship, his countenance changing remarkably as he spoke, "I conceive to be the greatest evil, the greatest curse, that can be inflicted on a man of sense."

He walked across the room with long, firm, indignant strides—then stopping short, he exclaimed, "*Lettres de cachet!*—Dangerous instruments in bad hands!—As what are not?—But one good purpose they answered—they put it in the power of the head of every noble house to disown, and to deprive of the liberty to disgrace his family, any member who should manifest the will to commit desperate crime or desperate folly."

Alfred was by no means disposed to join in praise even of this use of a *lettre de cachet*, but he did not think it a proper time to argue the point, as he saw Lord Oldborough was under the influence of some strong passion. He waited in silence till his lordship should explain himself farther.

His lordship unlocked a desk, and produced a letter.

"Pray, Mr Percy—Mr Alfred Percy—have you heard anything lately of the Marchioness of Twickenham?"

"No, my lord."

Alfred, at this instant, recollected the whisper which he had once heard at chapel, and he added, "Not of late, my lord."

"There," said Lord Oldborough, putting a letter into Alfred's hands—"there is the sum of what I have heard."

The letter was from the Duke of Greenwich, informing Lord Oldborough that an unfortunate discovery had been made of *an affair* between the Marchioness

of Twickenham and a certain Captain Bellamy, which rendered an immediate separation necessary.

"So!" thought Alfred, "my brother Godfrey had a fine escape of this fair lady!"

"I have seen her once since I received that letter, and I never will see her again," said Lord Oldborough: "that's past—all that concerns her is past and irremediable. Now as to the future, and to what concerns myself. I have been informed—how truly, I cannot say—that some time ago a rumour, a suspicion of this intrigue, was whispered in what they call the fashionable world."

"I believe that your lordship has been truly informed," said Alfred; and he then mentioned the whisper he had heard at the chapel.

"Ha!—Farther, it has been asserted to me, that a hint was given to the Marquis of Twickenham of the danger of suffering that—what is the man's name?—Bellamy, to be so near his wife; and that the hint was disregarded."

"The marquis did very weakly or very wickedly," said Alfred.

"All wickedness is weakness, sir, you know: but to our point. I have been assured that the actual discovery of the intrigue was made to the marquis some months previous to the birth of his child—and that he forbore to take any notice of this, lest it might affect the legitimacy of that child. After the birth of the infant—a boy—subsequent indiscretions on the part of the marchioness, the marquis would make it appear, gave rise to his first suspicions. Now, sir, these are the points, of which, as my friend, and as a professional man, I desire you to ascertain the truth. If the facts are as I have thus heard, I presume no divorce can be legally obtained."

"Certainly not, my lord."

"Then I will direct you instantly to the proper channels for information.

Whilst Lord Oldborough wrote directions, Alfred assured him he would fulfil his commission with all the discretion and celerity in his power.

"The next step," continued Lord Oldborough—"for, on such a subject, I wish to say all that is necessary at once, that it may be banished from my mind—your next step, supposing the facts to be ascertained, is to go with this letter—my answer to the Duke of Greenwich. See him—and see the marquis. In matters of consequence have nothing to do with secondary people—deal with the principals. Show in the first place, as a lawyer, that their divorce is unattainable—next, show the marquis that he destroys his son and heir by attempting it. The duke, I believe, would be glad of a pretext for dissolving the political connexion between me and the Greenwich family. He fears me, and he fears the world: he dares not abandon me without a pretence for the dissolution of friendship. He is a weak man, and never dares to act without a pretext; but show him that a divorce is not necessary for his purpose—a separation will do as well——Or without it, I am ready to break with him at council, in the House of Lords, on a hundred political points; and let him shield himself as he may from the reproach of desertion, by leaving the blame of quarrel on my impracticability, or on what he will, I care not—so that my family be saved from the ignominy of divorce."

As he sealed his letter, Lord Oldborough went on in abrupt sentences.

"I never counted on a weak man's friendship——I can do without his grace——Woman! Woman! The same—ever since the beginning of the world!"

Then turning to Alfred to deliver the letter into his

hand, "Your brother, Major Percy, sir—I think I recollect——He was better in the West Indies."

"I was just thinking so, my lord," said Alfred.

"Yes—better encounter the plague than a fool."

Lord Oldborough had never before distinctly adverted to his knowledge of his niece's partiality for Godfrey, but his lordship now added, "Major Percy's honourable conduct is not unknown: I trust honourable conduct never was, and never will be, lost upon me.—— This to the Duke of Greenwich—and this to the marquis.——Since it was to be, I rejoice that this Captain Bellamy is the gallant.——Had it been your brother, sir—could there have been any love in the case—not, observe, that I believe in love, much less am I subject to the weakness of remorse—but a twinge might have seized my mind—I might possibly have been told that the marchioness was married against her inclination——But I am at ease on that point—my judgment of her was right.——You will let me know, in one word, the result of your negotiation without entering into particulars—divorce, or no divorce, is all I wish to hear."

Alfred did not know all the circumstances of the Marchioness of Twickenham's marriage, nor the peremptory manner in which it had been insisted upon by her uncle, otherwise he would have felt still greater surprise than that which he now felt, at the stern unbending character of the man. Possessed as Lord Oldborough was by the opinion that he had at the time judged and acted in the best manner possible, no after-events could make him doubt the justice of his own decision, or could at all shake him in his own estimation.

Alfred soon brought his report. "In one word—no divorce, my lord."

"That's well—I thank you, sir."

His lordship made no farther inquiries—not even whether there was to be a *separation*.

Alfred was commissioned by the Duke of Greenwich to deliver a message, which, like the messages of the gods in Homer, he delivered verbatim, and without comment: "His grace of Greenwich trusts Lord Oldborough will believe, that notwithstanding the unfortunate circumstances, which dissolved in some degree the family connexion, it was the farthest possible from his grace's wish or thoughts to break with Lord Oldborough, as long as private feelings, and public principles, could be rendered by any means compatible."

Lord Oldborough smiled in scorn—and Alfred could scarcely command his countenance.

Lord Oldborough prepared to give his grace the opportunity, which he knew he desired, of differing with him on principle: his lordship thought his favour and power were now sufficiently established to be able to do without the Duke of Greenwich, and his pride prompted him to show this to his grace and to the world. He carried it with a high hand for a short time; but even whilst he felt most secure, and when all seemed to bend and bow before his genius and his sway, many circumstances and many persons were combining to work the downfall of his power.

One of the first slight circumstances which shook his favour was a speech he had made to some gentleman about the presentation of the deanery to Buckhurst Falconer. It had been supposed by many, who knew the court which commissioner Falconer paid to Lord Oldborough, that it was through his lordship's interest that this preferment was given to the son; but when some person, taking this for granted, spoke of it to his lordship, he indignantly disclaimed all part in the transaction, and it is said that he added, "Sir, I know what is due to private regard as a man—and as a minister

what must be yielded to Parliamentary influence; but I never could have advised the bestowing ecclesiastical benefice and dignity upon any one whose conduct was not his first recommendation."

This speech, made in a moment of proud and perhaps unguarded indignation, was repeated with additions, suppressions, variations, and comments. Anything will at court serve the purpose of those who wish to injure, and it is inconceivable what mischief was done to the minister by this slight circumstance. In the first place, the nobleman high in office, and the family connexions of the nobleman who had made the exchange of livings, and given the promise of the deanery to Bishop Clay, were offended beyond redemption—because they were in the wrong. Then, all who had done, or wished to do, wrong in similar instances, were displeased by reflection or by anticipation. But Lord Oldborough chiefly was injured by misrepresentation in the quarter where it was of most consequence to him to preserve his influence. It was construed by the highest authority into disrespect, and an imperious desire to encroach on favour, to control prerogative, and to subdue the mind of his sovereign. Insidious arts had long been secretly employed to infuse these ideas; and when once the jealousy of power was excited, every trifle confirmed the suspicion which Lord Oldborough's uncourtierlike character was little calculated to dispel. His popularity now gave umbrage, and it was hinted that he wished to make himself the *independent* minister of the people.

The affairs of the country prospered, however, under his administration; there was trouble, there was hazard in change. It was argued, that it was best to wait at least for some reverse of fortune in war, or some symptom of domestic discontent, before an attempt should be made to displace this minister, formidable by his talents, and by the awe his commanding character inspired.

The habit of confidence and deference for his genius and integrity remained, and to him no difference for some time appeared, in consequence of the secret decay of favour.

Commissioner Falconer, timid, anxious, restless, was disposed by circumstances and by nature, or by second nature, to the vigilance of a dependant's life; accustomed to watch and consult daily the barometer of court favour, he soon felt the coming storm; and the moment he saw prognostics of the change, he trembled, and considered how he should best provide for his own safety before the hour of danger arrived. Numerous libels against the minister appeared, which Lord Oldborough never read, but the commissioner, with his best spectacles, read them all; for he well knew and believed what the sage Selden saith, that "though some make slight of libels, yet you may see by them how the wind sets."

After determining by the throwing up of these straws which way the wind set, the commissioner began with all possible skill and dexterity to trim his boat. But dexterous trimmer though he was, and "prescient of change," he did not yet foresee from what quarter the storm would come.

Count Altenberg's letters had unveiled completely the envoy Cunningham Falconer's treachery as far as it related to his intrigues abroad, and other friends detected some of his manœuvres with politicians at home, to whom he had endeavoured to pay court, by betraying confidence reposed in him respecting the Tourville papers. Much of the mischief Cunningham had done this great minister still operated, unknown to his unsuspicious mind: but sufficient was revealed to determine Lord Oldborough to dismiss him from all future hopes of his favour.

"Mr Commissioner Falconer," he began one morn-

ing, the moment the commissioner entered his cabinet, "Mr Commissioner Falconer," in a tone which instantly dispelled the smile at entrance from the commissioner's countenance, and in the same moment changed his whole configurature. "My confidence is withdrawn from your son, Mr Cunningham Falconer—for ever—and not without good reason—as you may—if you are not aware of it already—see, by those papers."

Lord Oldborough turned away, and asked his secretaries for his red box, as he was going to council.

Just as he left his cabinet, he looked back, and said, "Mr Falconer, you should know, if you be not already apprised of it, that your son Cunningham is on his road to Denmark. You should be aware that the journey is not made by my desire, or by his Majesty's order, or by any official authority; consequently he is travelling to the court of Denmark at his own expence or yours — unless he can prevail upon his grace of Greenwich to defray his ambassadorial travelling charges, or can afford to wait for them till a total change of administration—of which, sir, if I see any symptoms to-day in council," added his lordship, in the tone of bitter irony; "I will give you fair notice —for fair dealing is what I practise."

This said, the minister left the commissioner to digest his speech as he might, and repaired to council, where he found everything apparently as smooth as usual, and where he was received by all, especially by the highest, with perfect consideration.

Meantime commissioner Falconer was wretched beyond expression—wretched in the certainty that his son, that he himself, had probably lost, irrecoverably, one excellent patron, before they had secured, even in case of change, another. This pre-

mature discovery of Cunningham's intrigues totally disconcerted and overwhelmed him; and, in the bitterness of his heart, he cursed the duplicity which he had taught and encouraged still more by example than by precept. But Cunningham's duplicity had more and closer folds than his own. Cunningham, conceited of his diplomatic genius, and fearful of the cautious timidity of his father, did not trust that father with the knowledge of all he did, or half of what he intended; so that the commissioner, who had thought himself at the bottom of everything, now found that he, too, had been cheated by his son with false confidences; and was involved by him in the consequences of a scheme, of which he had never been the adviser. Commissioner Falconer knew too well, by the experience of Cumberland and others, the fate of those who suffer themselves to be lured on by second-hand promises; and who venture, without being publicly acknowledged by their employers, to undertake any diplomatic mission. Nor would Cunningham, whose natural disposition to distrust was greater than his father's, have sold himself to any political tempter without first signing and sealing the compact, had he been in possession of his cool judgment, and had he been in any other than the desperate circumstances in which he was placed. His secret conscience whispered that his recall was in consequence of the detection of some of his intrigues, and he dreaded to appear before the haughty irritated minister. Deceived also by news from England that Lord Oldborough's dismission or resignation could not be distant, Cunningham had ventured upon this bold stroke for an embassy.

On Lord Oldborough's return from council, the commissioner finding, from his secret informants, that everything had gone on smoothly, and being overawed by the confident security of the minister, began

to doubt his former belief; and, in spite of all the symptoms of change, was now inclined to think that none would take place. The sorrow and contrition with which he next appeared before Lord Oldborough were, therefore, truly sincere; and when he found himself alone once more with his lordship, earnest was the vehemence with which he disclaimed his unworthy son, and disavowed all knowledge of the transaction.

"If I had seen cause to believe that you had any part in this transaction, sir, you would not be here at this moment · therefore, your protestations are superfluous—none would be accepted if any were necessary."

The very circumstance of the son's not having trusted the father completely saved the commissioner, for this time, from utter ruin: he took breath; and presently—oh, weak man! doomed never to know how to deal with a strong character—fancying that his intercession might avail for his son, and that the pride of Lord Oldborough might be appeased, and might be suddenly wrought to forgiveness, by that tone and posture of submission and supplication used only by the subject to offended majesty, he actually threw himself at the feet of the minister.

"My gracious lord—a pardon for my son!"

"I beseech you, sir!" cried Lord Oldborough, endeavouring to stop him from kneeling—the commissioner sunk instantly on his knee.

"Never will the unhappy father rise till his son be restored to your favour, my lord."

"Sir," said Lord Oldborough, "I have no favour for those who have no sense of honour: rise, Mr Falconer, and let not the father degrade himself for the son—*unavailingly*."

The accent and look were decisive—the commis-

sioner rose. Instead of being gratified, his patron seemed shocked, if not disgusted: far from being propitiated by this sacrifice of dignity, it rendered him still more averse; and no consolatory omen appearing, the commissioner withdrew in silence, repenting that he had abased himself. After this some days and nights passed with him in all the horrors of indecision —Could the minister weather the storm or not?—should Mr Falconer endeavour to reinstate himself with Lord Oldborough, or secure in time favour with the Duke of Greenwich?—Mrs Falconer, to whom her husband's groans in the middle of the night at last betrayed the sufferings of his mind, drew from him the secret of his fears and meditations. She advised strongly the going over, decidedly, and in time, but secretly, to the Greenwich faction.

The commissioner knew that this could not be done secretly. The attention of the minister was now awake to all his motions, and the smallest movement towards his grace of Greenwich must be observed and understood. On the other hand, to abide by a falling minister was folly, especially when he had positively withdrawn his favour from Cunningham, who had the most to expect from his patronage. Between these opposite difficulties, notwithstanding the urgent excitations of Mrs Falconer, the poor commissioner could not bring himself to decide, till the time for action was past.

Another blow came upon him for which he was wholly unprepared—there arrived from abroad accounts of the failure of a secret expedition; and the general in his despatches named Colonel John Falconer as the officer to whose neglect of orders he principally attributed the disappointment. It appeared that orders had been sent to have his regiment at a certain place at a given hour. At the moment these orders came,

Colonel John Falconer was out on a shooting party without leave. The troops, of course, on which the general had relied, did not arrive in time, and all his other combinations failed from this neglect of discipline and disobedience of orders. Colonel Falconer was sent home to be tried by a court-martial.

"I pity you, sir," said Lord Oldborough, as commissioner Falconer, white as ashes, read in his presence these despatches—"I pity you, sir, from my soul: here is no fault of yours—the fault is mine."

It was one of the few faults of this nature which Lord Oldborough had ever committed. Except in the instance of the Falconer family, none could name any whom his lordship had placed in situations for which they were inadequate or unfit. Of this single error he had not foreseen the consequences; they were more important, more injurious to him and to the public, than he could have calculated or conceived. It appeared now as if the Falconer family were doomed to be his ruin. That the public knew, in general, that John Falconer had been promoted by ministerial favour, Lord Oldborough was aware; but he imagined that the peculiar circumstances of that affair were known only to himself and to commissioner Falconer's family. To his astonishment he found, at this critical moment, that the whole transaction had reached the ear of majesty, and that it was soon publicly known. The commissioner, with protestations and oaths, declared that the secret had never, by his means, transpired —it had been divulged by the baseness of his son Cunningham, who betrayed it to the Greenwich faction. They, skilled in all the arts of undermining a rival, employed the means that were thus put into their power with great diligence and effect.

It was observed at levee, that the sovereign looked coldly upon the minister. Every courtier whispered

that Lord Oldborough had been certainly much to blame. Disdainful of their opinions, Lord Oldborough was sensibly affected by the altered eye of his sovereign.

"What! After all my services!—At the first change of fortune!"

This sentiment swelled in his breast; but his countenance was rigidly calm, his demeanour towards the courtiers and towards his colleagues more than usually firm, if not haughty.

After the levee, he demanded a private audience.

Alone with the king, the habitual influence of this great minister's superior genius operated. The cold manner was changed, or, rather, it was changed involuntarily. From one "not used to the language of apology," the frank avowal of a fault has a striking effect. Lord Oldborough took upon himself the whole blame of the disaster that had ensued, in consequence of his error, an error frequent in other ministers, in him almost unprecedented.

He was answered with a smile of royal raillery, that the peculiar family circumstances which had determined his lordship so rapidly to promote that officer must, to all fathers of families and heads of houses, if not to statesmen and generals, be a sufficient and home apology.

Considering the peculiar talent which his sovereign possessed, and in which he gloried, that of knowing the connexions and domestic affairs, not only of the nobility near his person, but of private individuals remote from his court, Lord Oldborough had little cause to be surprised that this secret transaction should be known to his Majesty. Something of this his lordship, with all due respect, hinted in reply. At the termination of this audience, he was soothed by the condescending assurance that whilst the circumstances

of the late unfortunate reverse naturally created regret and mortification, no dissatisfaction with his ministerial conduct mixed with these feelings; on the contrary, he was assured that fear of the effect a disappointment might have on the mind of the public, in diminishing confidence in his lordship's efforts for the good of the country, was the sentiment which had lowered the spirits and clouded the brow of majesty.

His lordship returned thanks for the gracious demonstration of these sentiments—and bowing respectfully, withdrew. In the faces and behaviour of the courtiers, as in a glass, he saw reflected the truth. They all pretended to be in the utmost consternation; and he heard of nothing but "apprehensions for the effect on the public mind," and "fears for his lordship's popularity." His secretary, Mr Temple, heard, indeed, more of this than could reach his lordship's ear directly; for, even now, when they thought they foresaw his fall, few had sufficient courage to hazard the tone of condolence with Lord Oldborough, or to expose the face of hypocrisy to the severity of his penetrating eye. In secret every means had been taken to propagate in the city the knowledge of all the circumstances that were unfavourable to the minister, and to increase the dissatisfaction which any check in the success of our armies naturally produces. The tide of popularity, which had hitherto supported the minister, suddenly ebbed; and he fell, in public opinion, with astonishing rapidity. For the moment all was forgotten, but that he was the person who had promoted John Falconer to be a colonel, against whom the cry of the populace was raised with all the clamour of national indignation. The Greenwich faction knew how to take advantage of this disposition. It happened to be some festival, some holiday, when the common people, having nothing to do, are more disposed than

at any other time to intoxication and disorder. The emissaries of designing partisans mixed with the populace, and a mob gathered round the minister's carriage, as he was returning home late one day—the same carriage, and the same man, whom, but a few short weeks before, this populace had drawn with loud huzzas, and almost with tears of affection. Unmoved of mind, as he had been when he heard their huzzas, Lord Oldborough now listened to their execrations, till from abuse they began to proceed to outrage. Stones were thrown at his carriage. One of his servants narrowly escaped being struck. Lord Oldborough was alone—he threw open his carriage-door, and sprang out on the step.

"Whose life is it you seek?" cried he, in a voice which obtained instant silence. "Lord Oldborough's? Lord Oldborough stands before you. Take his life who dares—a life spent in your service. Strike! but strike openly. You are Englishmen, not assassins."

Then, turning to his servants, he added, in a calm voice, "Home—slowly. Not a man here will touch you. Keep your master in sight. If I fall, mark by what hand."

Then stepping down into the midst of the people, he crossed the street to the flagged pathway, the crowd opening to make way for him. He walked on with a deliberate firm step; the mob moving along with him, sometimes huzzaing, sometimes uttering horrid execrations in horrid tones. Lord Oldborough, preserving absolute silence, still walked on, never turned his head, or quickened his pace, till he reached his own house. Then, facing the mob, as he stood waiting till the door should be opened, the people, struck with his intrepidity, with one accord joined in a shout of applause.

The next instant, and before the door was opened, they cried, "Hat off!—Hat off!"

Lord Oldborough's hat never stirred. A man took up a stone.

"Mark that man!" cried Lord Oldborough.

The door opened. "Return to your homes, my countrymen, and bless God that you have not any of you to answer this night for murder!"

Then entering his house, he took off his hat, and gave it to one of his attendants. His secretary, Temple, had run downstairs to meet him, inquiring what was the cause of the disturbance.

"Only," said Lord Oldborough, "that I have served the people, but never bent to them."

"Curse them! they are not worth serving. Oh! I thought they'd have taken my lord's life that minute," cried his faithful servant Rodney. "The sight left my eyes. I thought he was gone for ever. Thank God! he's safe. Take off my lord's coat—I can't—for the soul of me. Curse those ungrateful people!"

"Do not curse them, my good Rodney," said Lord Oldborough, smiling. "Poor people, they are not ungrateful, only mistaken. Those who mislead them are to blame. The English are a fine people. Even an English mob, you see, is generous, and just, as far as it knows."

Lord Oldborough was sound asleep this night before any other individual in the house had finished talking of the dangers he had escaped.

The civil and military courage shown by the minister in the sudden attack upon his character and person were such as to raise him again at once to his former height in public esteem. His enemies were obliged to affect admiration. The Greenwich party, foiled in this attempt, now disavowed it. News of a victory effaced the memory of the late disappointment. Stocks rose—addresses for a change of ministry were quashed

—addresses of thanks and congratulation poured in—Lord Oldborough gave them to Mr Temple to answer, and kept the strength of his attention fixed upon the great objects which were essential to the nation and the sovereign he served.

Mr Falconer saw that the storm had blown over, the darkness was past—Lord Oldborough, firm and superior, stood bright in power, and before him the commissioner bent more obsequious, more anxious than ever. Anxious he might well be—unhappy father! the life, perhaps, of one of his sons, his honour, certainly, at stake—the fortune of another—his existence ruined! And what hopes of propitiating him who had so suffered by the favour he had already shown, who had been betrayed by one of the family, and disgraced by another. The commissioner's only hope was in the recollection of the words, "I pity you from my soul, sir," which burst from Lord Oldborough even at the moment when he had most reason to be enraged against Colonel Falconer. Following up this idea, and working on the generous compassion, of which but for this indication he would not have supposed the stern Lord Oldborough to be susceptible, the commissioner appeared before him every day the image of a broken-hearted father. In silence Lord Oldborough from time to time looked at him; and by these looks, more than by all the promises of all the great men who had ever spoken to him, Mr Falconer was reassured; and, as he told Mrs Falconer, who at this time was in dreadful anxiety, he felt certain that Lord Oldborough would not punish him for the faults of his sons—he was satisfied that his place and his pension would not be taken from him—and that, at least in fortune, they should not be utterly ruined. In this security the commissioner showed rather more than his customary degree of strength of mind, and more knowledge of

Lord Oldborough's character than he had upon most other occasions evinced.

Things were in this state, when, one morning, after the minister had given orders that no one should be admitted, as he was dictating some public papers of consequence to Mr Temple, the Duke of Greenwich was announced. His grace sent in a note to signify that he waited upon Lord Oldborough by order of his Majesty; and that, if this hour were not convenient, he begged to have the hour named at which his grace could be admitted. His grace was admitted instantly. Mr Temple retired—for it was evident this was to be a secret conference. His grace of Greenwich entered with the most important solemnity — infinitely more ceremonious than usual, he was at last seated, and, after heavy and audible sighs, still hesitated to open his business. Through the affected gloom and dejection of his countenance Lord Oldborough saw a malicious pleasure lurking, whilst, in a studied exordium, he spoke of the infinite reluctance with which he had been compelled, by his Majesty's express orders, to wait upon his lordship on a business the most painful to his feelings. As being a public colleague—as a near and dear connexion—as a friend in long habits of intimacy with his lordship, he had prayed his Majesty to be excused; but it was his Majesty's pleasure: he had only now to beg his lordship to believe, that it was with infinite concern, &c. Lord Oldborough, though suffering under this circumlocution, never condescended to show any symptom of impatience; but allowing his grace to run the changes on the words and forms of apology, when these were exhausted, his lordship simply said, that "His Majesty's pleasure of course precluded all necessity for apology."

His grace was vexed to find Lord Oldborough still unmoved—he was sure this tranquillity could not long

endure: he continued, "A sad business, my lord—a terrible discovery—I really can hardly bring myself to speak——"

Lord Oldborough gave his grace no assistance.

"My private regard," he repeated.

A smile of contempt on Lord Oldborough's countenance.

"Your lordship's hitherto invulnerable public integrity——"

A glance of indignation from Lord Oldborough.

"*Hitherto* invulnerable!—your grace will explain."

"Let these—these fatal notes—letters—unfortunately got into the hands of a leading, impracticable member of opposition, and by him laid——Would that I had been apprised, or could have conceived it possible, time enough to prevent that step; but it was done before I had the slightest intimation—laid before his Majesty——"

Lord Oldborough calmly received the letters from his grace.

"My own handwriting, and private seal, I perceive."

The duke sighed—and whilst Lord Oldborough drew out, opened, and read the first letter in the parcel, his grace went on—"This affair has thrown us all into the greatest consternation. It is to be brought before Parliament immediately—unless a resignation should take place—which we should all deplore. The impudence, the inveteracy of that fellow, is astonishing—no silencing him. We might hush up the affair if his Majesty had not been apprised; but where the interest of the service is concerned, his Majesty is warm."

"His Majesty!" cried Lord Oldborough: "his Majesty could not, I trust, for a moment imagine these letters to be mine?"

"But for the hand and seal, which I understood your lordship to acknowledge, I am persuaded his Majesty could not have believed it."

"Believed! My king!—did he believe it?" cried Lord Oldborough. His agitation was for a moment excessive, uncontrollable. "No! that I will never credit, till I have it from his own lips." Then commanding himself, "Your grace will have the goodness to leave these letters with me till to-morrow."

His grace, with infinite politeness and regret, was under the necessity of refusing this request. His orders were only to show the letters to his lordship, and then to restore them to the hands of the member of opposition who had laid them before his Majesty.

Lord Oldborough took off the cover of one of the letters, on which was merely the address and seal. The address was written also at the bottom of the letter enclosed, therefore the cover could not be of the least importance. The duke could not, Lord Oldborough said, refuse to leave this with him.

To this his grace agreed—protesting that he was far from wishing to make difficulties. If there was anything else he could do—anything his lordship would wish to have privately insinuated or publicly said——

His lordship, with proud thanks, assured the duke he did not wish to have anything privately insinuated; and whatever it was necessary to say or do publicly, he should do himself, or give orders to have done. His lordship entered into no farther explanation. The duke at last was obliged to take his leave, earnestly hoping and trusting that this business would terminate to his lordship's entire satisfaction.

No sooner was the duke gone than Lord Oldborough rang for his carriage.

"Immediately—and Mr Temple, instantly."

Whilst his carriage was coming to the door, in the shortest manner possible Lord Oldborough stated the facts to his secretary, that letters had been forged in his lordship's name, promising to certain persons promotion in the army—and navy—gratification—and pensions. Some were addressed to persons who had actually obtained promotion, shortly after the time of these letters; others contained reproaches for having been ill-used. Even from the rapid glance Lord Oldborough had taken of these papers, he had retained the names of several of the persons to whom they were addressed—and the nature of the promotion obtained. They were persons who could have had no claim upon an honest minister. His lordship left a list of them with Mr Temple—also the cover of the letter, on which was a specimen of the forged writing and the private seal.

"I am going to the king. In my absence, Mr Temple, think for me—I know you feel for me. The object is to discover the authors of this forgery."

"My lord, may I consult with Mr Alfred Percy?"

"Yes—with no other person."

It was not Lord Oldborough's day for doing business with the king. He was late—the king was going out to ride. His Majesty received the minister as usual; but notwithstanding the condescension of his Majesty's words and manner, it was evident to Lord Oldborough's penetration that there was a coldness and formality in the king's countenance.

"I beg I may not detain your Majesty—I see I am late," said Lord Oldborough.

"Is the business urgent, my lord?"

"No, sir; for it concerns principally myself: it can, therefore, wait your Majesty's leisure at any hour your Majesty may appoint."

The king dismounted instantly.

"This moment, my lord, I am at leisure for any business that concerns your lordship."

The king returned to the palace—Lord Oldborough followed, and all the spectators on foot and horseback were left full of curiosity.

Notwithstanding the condescension of his Majesty's words and manner, and the polite promptitude to attend to any business that concerned his lordship, it was evident to Lord Oldborough's penetration that there was an unusual coldness and formality in the king's countenance and deportment, unlike the graciousness of his reception when satisfied and pleased. As soon as the business of the day had been gone through, Lord Oldborough said he must now beg his Majesty's attention on a subject which principally concerned himself. The king looked as one prepared to hear, but determined to say as little as possible.

Lord Oldborough placed himself so as to give the king the advantage of the light, which he did not fear to have full on his own countenance.

"Sir, certain letters, signed with my name, and sealed with my seal, have, I am informed, been laid before your Majesty."

"Your lordship has been rightly informed."

"I trust—I hope that your Majesty——"

At the firm assertion, in the tone with which Lord Oldborough pronounced, I *trust*—his Majesty's eye changed—and moved away from Lord Oldborough's, when he, with respectful interrogation of tone, added, "I *hope* your Majesty could not believe those letters to be mine?"

"Frankly, my lord," said the king, "the assertions, the insinuations of no man, or set of men, of any rank or weight in my dominions, could by any imaginable means have induced me to conceive it possible that

such letters had been written by your lordship. Not for one moment could my belief have been compelled by any evidence less strong than your lordship's handwriting and seal. I own, I thought I knew your lordship's seal and writing; but I now see that I have been deceived, and I rejoice to see it."

"I thank your Majesty. I cannot feel surprise that a forgery and a counterfeit which, at first view, compelled my own belief of their being genuine, should, for a moment, have deceived you, sir; but, I own, I had flattered myself that my sovereign knew my heart and character yet better than my seal and signature."

"Undoubtedly, my lord."

"And I should have hoped that, if your Majesty had perused those letters, no assertions could have been necessary, on my part, to convince you, sir, that they could not be mine. I have now only to rejoice that your Majesty is undeceived; and that I have not intruded unnecessarily with this explanation. I am fully sensible, sir, of your goodness, in having thus permitted me to make, as early as possible, this assertion of my innocence. For the proofs of it, and for the detection of the guilty, I am preparing; and I hope to make these as clear to you, sir, as your Majesty's assurance of the pleasure you feel in being undeceived is satisfactory—consolatory to me," concluded Lord Oldborough, with a bow of profound yet proud respect.

"My lord," said the king, "I have no doubt that this affair will redound to your honour, and *terminate to your lordship's entire satisfaction.*"

The very phrase used by the Duke of Greenwich.

"As to myself, your lordship can have no farther anxiety; but I wish your lordship's endeavours to detect and bring proofs home to the guilty may be

promptly successful—for the gratification of your own feelings, and the satisfaction of the public mind, before the matter should be brought forward in Parliament.

His Majesty bowed, and as Lord Oldborough retired, he added some gracious phrases, expressive of the high esteem he felt for the minister, and the interest he had always, and should always take, in whatever could contribute to his public and private—*satisfaction*—(again).

To an eye and ear less practised in courts than this minister's all that had been said would have been really satisfactory: but Lord Oldborough discerned a secret embarrassment in the smile, a constraint in the manner, a care, an effort to be gracious in the language, a caution, a rounding of the periods, a recurrence to technical phrases of compliment and amity, a want of the free fluent language of the heart; language which, as it flows, whether from sovereign or subject, leaves a trace that the art of courtier or of monarch cannot imitate. In all attempts at such imitation, there is a want, of which vanity and even interest is not always sensible, but which feeling perceives instantly. Lord Oldborough felt it—and twice, during this audience, he was on the point of offering his resignation, and twice, exerting strong power over himself, he refrained.

He saw plainly that he was not where he had been in the king's confidence; that his enemies had been at work, and, in some measure, had succeeded; that suspicions had been infused into the king's mind. That his king had doubted him, his Majesty had confessed—and Lord Oldborough discerned that there was no genuine joy at the moment his Majesty was undeceived, no real anxiety for his honour, only the ostensible manifestation suitable to the occasion—repeatable—or recordable.

Still there was nothing of which he could complain; every expression, if written down or repeated, must have appeared proper and gracious from the sovereign to his minister; and for that minister to resign at such a moment, from pride or pique, would have been fatal to the dignity, perhaps to the integrity, of his character.

Lord Oldborough reasoned thus as he stood in the presence of the king, and compelled himself, during the whole audience, and to the last parting moment, to preserve an air and tone of calm, respectful self-possession.

Chapter xxviij.

DURING Lord Oldborough's absence, his faithful secretary had been active in his service. Mr Temple went immediately to his friend Alfred Percy. Alfred had just returned fatigued from the courts, and was resting himself, in conversation with his wife and Caroline.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Alfred," said Mr Temple, "but I must take you away from these ladies to consult you on particular business."

"Oh! let the particular business wait till he has rested himself," said Mrs Percy, "unless it be a matter of life and death."

"Life and death!" cried Lady Frances Arlington, running in at the open door—"Yes, it is a matter of life and death!—Stay, Mr Temple! Mr Percy! going the moment I come into the room—Impossible!"

"Impossible it would be," said Mr Temple, "in any other case; but——"

> "'When a lady's in the case,
> You know all other things give place,'"

cried Lady Frances. "So, positively, gentlemen, I

stop the way. But, Mr Temple, to comfort you—for I never saw a man, gallant, or ungallant, look so impatient—I shall not be able to stay above a moment ——Thank you, Mrs Percy, I can't sit down—Mrs Crabstock, the crossest of Crabstocks and stiffest of pattern-women, is in the carriage waiting for me. Give me joy—I have accomplished my purpose, and without Lady Jane Granville's assistance—obtained a permit to go with Lady Trant, and made her take me to Lady Angelica's last night. Grand conversazione! —Saw the German baron! Caught both the profiles —have 'em here—defy you not to smile. Look," cried her ladyship, drawing out of her *reticule* a caricature, which she put into Caroline's hand; and, whilst she was looking at it, Lady Frances went on speaking rapidly. "Only a sketch, a scrawl in pencil, while they thought I was copying a Sonnet to Wisdom—on the worst bit of paper, too, in the world—old cover of a letter I stole from Lady Trant's *reticule* while she was at cards. Mr Temple, you shall see my *chef-d'œuvre* by-and-by; don't look at the reverse of the medal, pray. Did not I tell you, you were the most impatient man in the world?"

It was true that Mr Temple was at this instant most impatient to get possession of the paper, for on the back of that cover of the letter, on which the caricature was drawn, the handwriting of the direction appeared to him——He dared scarcely believe his eyes—his hopes.

"Mrs Crabstock, my lady," said the footman, "is waiting."

"I know, sir," said Lady Frances: "so, Caroline, you won't see the likeness. Very well; if I can't get a compliment, I must be off. When you draw a caricature, I won't praise it. Here! Mr Temple, one look, since you are dying for it."

"One look will not satisfy me," cried Mr Temple, seizing the paper: "your ladyship must leave the drawing with us till to-morrow."

"*Us—must.* Given at our Court of St James's. Lord Oldborough's own imperative style."

"Imperative! no; humbly I beseech your ladyship, thus humbly," cried Mr Temple, kneeling in jest, but keeping in earnest fast hold of the paper.

"But why—why? Are you acquainted with Lady Angelica. I did not know you knew her."

"It is excellent!—It is admirable!—I cannot let it go. This hand that seized it long shall hold the prize."

"The man's mad! But don't think I'll give it to you—I would not give it to my mother: but I'll lend it to you, if you'll tell me honestly why you want it."

"Honestly—I want to show it to a particular friend, who will be delighted with it."

"Tell me who, this minute, or you shall not have it."

"Mrs Crabstock, my lady, bids me say, the duchess——"

"The duchess—the deuce!—if she's come to the duchess, I must go. I hope your man, Mrs Percy, won't tell Mrs Crabstock he saw this gentleman kneeling."

"Mrs Crabstock's getting out, my lady," said the footman, returning.

"Mr Temple, for mercy's sake, get up."

"Never till your ladyship gives the drawing."

"There! there! let me go—audacious!"

"Good morning to you, Mrs Percy—Good-bye, Caroline——Be at Lady Jane's to-night, for I'm to be there."

Her ladyship ran off, and met Mrs Crabstock on the

stairs, with whom we leave her to make her peace as she pleases.

"My dear Temple, I believe you are out of your senses," said Alfred: "I never saw any man so importunate about a drawing that is not worth a straw—trembling with eagerness, and kneeling!—Caroline, what do you think Rosamond would have thought of all this?"

"If she knew the whole, she would have thought I acted admirably," said Mr Temple. "But come, I have business."

Alfred took him into his study, and there the whole affair was explained. Mr Temple had brought with him the specimen of the forgery to show to Alfred, and, upon comparing it with the handwriting on the cover of the letter on which the caricature was drawn, the similarity appeared to be strikingly exact. The cover, which had been stolen, as Lady Frances Arlington said, from Lady Trant's *reticule*, was directed to Captain Nuttall. He was one of the persons to whom forged letters had been written, as appeared by the list which Lord Oldborough had left with Mr Temple. The secretary was almost certain that his lordship had never written with his own hand to any Captain Nuttall; but this he could ask the moment he should see Lord Oldborough again. It seemed as if this paper had never been actually used as the cover of a letter, for it had no post-mark, seal, or wafer. Upon farther inspection, it was perceived that a *t* had been left out in the name of *Nuttall;* and it appeared probable that the cover had been thrown aside, and a new one written, in consequence of this omission. But Alfred did not think it possible that Lady Trant could be the forger of these letters, because he had seen some of her ladyship's notes of invitation to Caroline, and they were written in a wretched cramped hand.

"But that cramped hand might be feigned to conceal the powers of penmanship," said Mr Temple.

"Well! granting her ladyship's talents were equal to the mere execution," Alfred persisted in thinking she had not abilities sufficient to invent or combine all the parts of such a scheme. "She might be an accomplice, but she must have had a principal—and who could that principal be?"

The same suspicion, the same person, came at the same moment into the heads of both gentlemen, as they sat looking at each other.

"There is an intimacy between them," said Alfred. "Recollect all the pains Lady Trant took for Mrs Falconer about English Clay—they——"

"Mrs Falconer! But how could she possibly get at Lord Oldborough's private seal—a seal that is always locked up—a seal never used to any common letter, never to any but those written by his own hand to some private friend, and on some very particular occasion? Since I have been with him I have not seen him use that seal three times."

"When and to whom, can you recollect?" said Alfred.

"I recollect!—I have it all!" exclaimed Mr Temple, striking the table—"I have it! But Lady Frances Arlington—I am sorry she is gone."

"Why! what of her?—Lady Frances can have nothing more to do with the business."

"She has a great deal more, I can assure you—but without knowing it."

"Of that I am certain, or all the world would have known it long ago: but tell me how."

"I recollect, at the time when I was dangling after Lady Frances — there's good in everything — just before we went down to Falconer Court, her ladyship, who, you know, has always some reigning fancy, was

distracted about what she called *bread-seals*. She took off the impression of seals with bread—no matter how, but she did—and used to torment me—no, I thought it a great pleasure at the time—to procure for her all the pretty seals I could."

"But, surely, you did not give her Lord Oldborough's?"

"I!—not I!—how could you imagine such a thing?"

"You were in love, and might have forgotten consequences."

"A man in love may forget everything, I grant—except his fidelity. No, I never gave the seal; but I perfectly recollect Lady Frances showing it to me in her collection, and my asking her how she came by it."

"And how did she?"

"From the cover of a note which the duke, her uncle, had received from Lord Oldborough; and I, at the time, remembered his lordship's having written it to the Duke of Greenwich on the birth of his grandson. Lord Oldborough had, upon a former occasion, affronted his grace by sending him a note sealed with a wafer—this time his lordship took special care, and sealed it with his private *seal of honour*."

"Well! but how does this bring the matter home to Mrs Falconer?" said Alfred.

"Stay—I am bringing it as near home to her as possible. We all went down to Falconer Court together; and there I remember Lady Frances had her collection of bread-seals, and was daubing and colouring them with vermilion—and Mrs Falconer was so anxious about them—and Lady Frances gave her several—I must see Lady Frances again directly, to inquire whether she gave her, among the rest, Lord Oldborough's—I'll go to Lady Jane Granville's this

evening on purpose. But had I not better go this moment to Lady Trant?"

Alfred advised, that having traced the matter thus far, they should not hazard giving any alarm to Lady Trant or to Mrs Falconer, but should report to Lord Oldborough what progress had been made.

Mr Temple accordingly went home, to be in readiness for his lordship's return. In the meantime, his first exaltation of indignant pride having subsided, and his cool judgment reflecting upon what had passed, Lord Oldborough considered that, however satisfactory to his own mind might be the feeling of his innocence, the proofs of it were necessary to satisfy the public; he saw that his character would be left doubtful, and at the mercy of his enemies, if he were in pique and resentment hastily to resign, before he had vindicated his integrity. "*If* your proofs be produced, my lord!"—these words recurred to him, and his anxiety to obtain these proofs rose high; and high was his satisfaction the moment he saw his secretary, for by the first glance at Mr Temple's countenance he perceived that some discovery had been made.

Alfred, that night, received through Mr Temple his lordship's request, that he would obtain what farther information he could relative to the private seal, in whatever way he thought most prudent. His lordship trusted entirely to his discretion—Mr Temple was engaged with other business.

Alfred went with Caroline to Lady Jane Granville's, to meet Lady Frances Arlington; he entered into conversation, and by degrees brought her to his point, playing all the time with her curiosity, and humouring her childishness, while he carried on his cross-examination.

At first she could not recollect anything about making the seals he talked of. "It was a fancy that

had passed—and a past fancy," she said, "was like a past love, or a past beauty, good for nothing but to be forgotten." However, by proper leading of the witness, and suggesting time, place, and circumstance, he did bring to the fair lady's mind all that he wanted her to remember. She could not conceive what interest Mr Percy could take in the matter—it was some jest about Mr Temple, she was sure. Yes, she did recollect a seal with a Cupid riding a lion, that Mr Temple gave her just before they went to Falconer Court—was that what he meant?

"No—but a curious seal——" (Alfred described the device.)

"Lord Oldborough's! Yes, there was some such odd seal." But it was not given to her by Mr Temple—she took that from a note to her uncle, the Duke of Greenwich.

Yes—that, Alfred said, he knew; but what did her ladyship do with it?

"You know how I got it! Bless me, you seem to know everything I do and say. You know my affairs vastly well—you act the conjuror admirably—pray, can you tell me who I am to marry?"

"That I will—when your ladyship has told me to whom you gave that seal."

"That I would, and welcome, if I could recollect—but I really can't. If you think I gave it to Mr Temple, I assure you, you are mistaken—you may ask him."

"I know your ladyship did not give it to Mr Temple—but to whom did you give it?"

"I remember now—not to any gentleman, after all—you are positively out. I gave it to Mrs Falconer."

"You are certain of that, Lady Frances Arlington?"

"I am certain, Mr Alfred Percy."

"And how can you prove it to me, Lady Frances?"

"The easiest way in the world—by asking Mrs Falconer. Only I don't go there now much since Georgiana and I have quarrelled—but what can make you so curious about it?"

"That's a secret."—At the word *secret*, her attention was fixed.—"May I ask, if your ladyship would know the seal again if you saw it?—Is this anything like the impression?" (showing her the seal on the forged cover).

"The very same that I gave Mrs Falconer, I'll swear to it—I'll tell you how I know it particularly. There's a little outer rim here, which points to it, which there is not to the other. I fastened my bread-seal into an old setting of my own, from which I had lost the stone. Mrs Falconer took a fancy to it, among a number of others, so I let her have it. Now I have answered all your questions—answer mine—Who am I to marry?"

"Your ladyship will marry whoever—your ladyship *pleases*."

"That was an ambiguous answer," she observed; "for that she *pleased* everybody." Her ladyship was going to run on with some farther questions, but Alfred, pretending that the oracle was not permitted to answer more explicitly, left her completely in the dark as to what his meaning had been in this whole conversation.

He reported progress to Lord Oldborough—and his lordship slept as soundly this night as he did the night after he had been attacked by the mob.

The next morning the first person he desired to see was Mr Falconer—his lordship sent for him into his cabinet.

"Mr Commissioner Falconer, I promised to give you notice whenever I should see any probability of my going out of power."

"Good heaven! my lord," exclaimed the commissioner, starting back. The surprise, the consternation were real—Lord Oldborough had his eye upon him to determine that point.

"Impossible, surely!—I hope——"

His hope flitted at the moment to the Duke of Greenwich—but returned instantly: he had made no terms—had missed his time. If Lord Oldborough should go out of office—his place, his pension, gone—utter ruin.

Lord Oldborough marked the vacillation and confusion of his countenance, and saw that he was quite unprepared.

"I hope—Merciful Powers! I trust——I thought your lordship had triumphed over all your enemies, and was firmer in favour and power than ever. What can have occurred?"

Without making any answer, Lord Oldborough beckoned to the commissioner to approach nearer the window where his lordship was standing, and then suddenly put into his hand the cover with the forged handwriting and seal.

"What am I to understand by this, my lord?" said the bewildered commissioner, turning it backwards and forwards. "Captain Nuttall!—I never saw the man in my life. May I ask, my lord, what I am to comprehend from this?"

"I see, sir, that you know nothing of the business."

The whole was explained by Lord Oldborough succinctly. The astonishment and horror in the poor commissioner's countenance and gestures, and still more, the eagerness with which he begged to be permitted to try to discover the authors of this forgery, were sufficient proofs that he had not the slightest suspicion that the guilt could be traced to any of his own family.

Lord Oldborough's look, fixed on the commissioner,

expressed what it had once before expressed—"Sir, from my soul, I pity you!"

The commissioner saw this look, and wondered why Lord Oldborough should pity *him* at a time when all his lordship's feelings should naturally be for himself.

"My lord, I would engage we shall discover—we shall trace it."

"I believe that I have discovered—that I have traced it," said Lord Oldborough; and he sighed.

Now that sigh was more incomprehensible to the commissioner than all the rest, and he stood with his lips open for a moment, before he could utter, "Why then resign, my lord?"

"That is my affair," said Lord Oldborough. "Let us, if you please, sir, think of yours; for, probably, this is the only time I shall ever more have it in my power to be of the least service to you."

"Oh! my lord—my lord, don't say so!" said the commissioner, quite forgetting all his artificial manner, and speaking naturally: "the last time you shall have it in your power!—Oh! my dear lord, don't say so!"

"My dear sir, I must—it gives me pain—you see it does."

"At such a time as this to think of me instead of yourself! My lord, I never knew you till this moment—so well."

"Nor I you, sir," said Lord Oldborough. "It is the more unfortunate for us both, that our connexion and intercourse must now for ever cease."

"Never, never, my lord, if you were to go out of power to-morrow—which Heaven, in its mercy and justice, forbid! I could never forget the goodness—I would never desert—in spite of all interest—I should continue—I hope your lordship would permit me to pay my duty—all intercourse could never cease."

Lord Oldborough saw, and almost smiled at the

struggle between the courtier and the man—the confusion in the commissioner's mind between his feelings and his interest. Partly his lordship relieved, and partly he pained Mr Falconer, by saying, in his firm tone, "I thank you, Mr Falconer; but all intercourse must cease. After this hour, we meet no more. I beg you, sir, to collect your spirits, and to listen to me calmly. Before this day is at an end, you will understand why all farther intercourse between us would be useless to your interest, and incompatible with my honour. Before many hours are past, a blow will be struck which will go to your heart—for I see you have one—and deprive you of the power of thought. It is my wish to make that blow fall as lightly upon you as possible."

"Oh! my lord, your resignation would indeed be a blow I could never recover. The bare apprehension deprives me at this moment of all power of thought; but still I hope——"

"Hear me, sir, I beg, without interruption: it is my business to think for you. Go immediately to the Duke of Greenwich, make what terms with him you can—make what advantage you can of the secret of my approaching resignation—a secret I now put in your power to communicate to his grace, and which no one yet suspects—I having told it to no one living but to yourself. Go quickly to the duke—time presses—I wish you success—and a better patron than I have been, than my principles would permit me to be. Farewell, Mr Falconer."

The commissioner moved towards the door when Lord Oldborough said "*Time presses;*" but the commissioner stopped—turned back—could not go: the tears—real tears—rolled down his cheeks——Lord Oldborough went forward, and held out his hand to him—the commissioner kissed it, with the reverence

with which he would have kissed his sovereign's hand; and bowing, he involuntarily backed to the door, as if quitting the presence of majesty.

"It is a pity that man was bred a mere courtier, and that he is cursed with a family on none of whom there is any dependence," thought Lord Oldborough, as the door closed upon the commissioner for ever.

Lord Oldborough delayed an hour purposely to give Mr Falconer advantage of the day with the Duke of Greenwich: then ordered his carriage, and drove to—Mrs Falconer's.

Great was her surprise at the minister's entrance.—"Concerned the commissioner was not at home."

"My business is with Mrs Falconer."

"My lord—your lordship—the honour and the pleasure of a visit——Georgiana, my dear."

Mrs Falconer nodded to her daughter, who most unwillingly, and as if dying with curiosity, retired.

The smile died away upon Mrs Falconer's lips as she observed the stern gravity of Lord Oldborough's countenance. She moved a chair towards his lordship—he stood, and leaning on the back of the chair, paused, as he looked at her.

"What is to come?—Cunningham, perhaps," thought Mrs Falconer; "or perhaps something about John. When will he speak?—I can't—I must——I am happy to see your lordship looking so well."

"Is Mrs Falconer acquainted with Lady Trant?"

"Lady Trant—yes, my lord."

"Mercy! Is it possible?—No, for her own sake she would not betray me," thought Mrs Falconer.

"Intimately?" said Lord Oldborough.

"Intimately—that is, as one's intimate with everybody of a certain sort—one visits—but no farther—I can't say I have the honour——"

Mrs Falconer was so distracted by seeing Lord

Oldborough searching in his pocket-book for a letter, that in spite of all her presence of mind, she knew not what she said; and all her presence of countenance failed, when Lord Oldborough placed before her eyes the cover directed to Captain Nuttall.

"Can you guess how this came into Lady Trant's possession, madam?"

"I protest, my lord," her voice trembling, in spite of her utmost efforts to command it, "I don't know —nor can I conceive——"

"Nor can you conceive by whom it was written, madam?"

"It appears—it bears a resemblance—some likeness —as far as I recollect—but it is so long since I have seen your lordship's own hand—and hands are so like —sometimes—and I am so bad a judge—every hand, all fashionable hands, are so like."

"And every seal like every seal?" said Lord Oldborough, placing the counterfeit seal before Mrs Falconer. "I recommend it to you, madam, to waste no farther time in evasion; but to deliver to me the counterpart of this seal, the impression of my private seal, which you had from Lady Frances Arlington."

"A mere bread-seal! Her ladyship surely has not said—I really have lost it—if I ever had it—I declare your lordship terrifies me so, by this strange mode——"

"I recommend it to you once more, madam, and for the last time I earnestly recommend it to you, to deliver up to me that seal, for I have sworn to my belief that it is in your possession; a warrant will in consequence be issued, to seize and search your papers. The purport of my present visit, of which I should gladly have been spared the pain, is to save you, madam, from the public disgrace of having a warrant executed. Do not faint, madam, if you can

avoid it, nor go into hysterics; for if you do, I must retire, and the warrant must be executed. Your best course is to open that desk, to give me up the seal, to make to me at this instant a full confession of all you know of this transaction. If you do thus, for your husband's sake, madam, I will, as far as I can consistently with what is due to myself, spare you the shame of an arrest."

Mrs Falconer, with trembling hands, unlocked the desk, and delivered the seal.

"And a letter which I see in this same handwriting, madam, if you please."

She gave it; and then, unable to support herself longer, sunk upon a sofa: but she neither fainted nor screamed—she was aware of the consequences. Lord Oldborough opened the window to give her air. She was relieved by a burst of tears, and was silent—and nothing was heard but her sobs, which she endeavoured to suppress in vain. She was more relieved on looking up by one glance at Lord Oldborough's countenance, where she saw compassion working strongly.

But before she could take any advantage of it, the expression was changed, the feeling was controlled: he was conscious of its weakness—he recollected what public justice, and justice to his own character, required—he recollected all the treachery, the criminality, of which she had been guilty.

"Madam, you are not now in a condition, I see, to explain yourself farther—I will relieve you from my presence: my reproaches you will never hear; but I shall expect from you, before one hour, such an avowal in writing of this whole transaction, as may, with the written confession of Lady Trant, afford the proofs which are due to my sovereign, and to the public, of my integrity."

Mrs Falconer bowed her head, covered her face, clasped her hands in agony: as Lord Oldborough retired, she sprang up, followed to throw herself at his feet, yet without knowing what she could say.

"The commissioner is innocent!—If you forsake him, he is undone—all, all of us, utterly ruined! Oh! Georgiana! Georgiana! where are you? speak for me!"

Georgiana was in an inner apartment, trying on a new robe *à la Georgienne*.

"Whatever you may wish farther to say to me, madam," said Lord Oldborough, disengaging himself from her, and passing decidedly on, before Georgiana appeared, "you will put in writing, and let me have within this hour—or never."

Within that hour commissioner Falconer brought for Lord Oldborough the paper his wife had drawn up, but which he was obliged to deliver to Mr Temple; for Lord Oldborough had so ordered, and his lordship persevered in refusing to see him more. Mrs Falconer's paper was worded with all the art and address of which she was mistress, and all the pathos she could command—Lord Oldborough looked only for facts—these he marked with his pencil, and observed where they corroborated and where they differed from Lady Trant's confession, which Mr Temple had been charged to obtain during his lordship's visit to Mrs Falconer. The greater part of the night Lord Oldborough and Mr Alfred Percy were employed arranging these documents, so as to put the proofs in the clearest and shortest form, to be laid before his Majesty the succeeding day.

It appeared that Mrs Falconer had been first tempted to these practices by the distress for money into which extravagant entertainments, or, as she stated, the expences incident to her situation—ex-

pences which far exceeded her income—had led her. It was supposed, from her having kept open house at times for the minister, that she and the commissioner had great influence; she had been applied to—presents had been offered, and she had long withstood. But, at length, Lady Trant acting in concert with her, they had been supplied with information by a clerk in one of the offices, a relation of Lady Trant, who was a vain, incautious youth, and, it seems, did not know the use made of his indiscretion: he told what promotions he heard spoken of—what commissions were making out. The ladies prophesied, and their prophecies being accomplished, they gained credit. For some time they kept themselves behind the scenes—and many, applying to A. B., and dealing with they did not know whom, paid for promotions which would have come unpaid for; others paid, and were never promoted, and wrote letters of reproach—Captain Nuttall was among these, and he it was who, finding himself duped, first stirred in the business; and by means of an active member of opposition, to whom he made known his secret grievance, brought the whole to light.

The proofs arranged (and Lord Oldborough never slept till they were perfected), he reposed tranquilly. The next day, asking an audience of his Majesty, he simply laid the papers on his Majesty's table, observing that he had been so fortunate as to succeed in tracing the forgery, and that he trusted these papers contained all the necessary proofs.

His lordship bowed and retired instantly, leaving his Majesty to examine the papers alone.

The resolution to resign his ministerial station had long been forming in Lord Oldborough's mind. It was not a resolution taken suddenly in pride or pique, but after reflection, and upon strong reasons. It was

a measure which he had long been revolving in his secret thoughts. During the enthusiasm of political life, the proverbial warnings against the vanity of ambition, and the danger of dependence on the favour of princes, had passed on his ear but as a schoolboy's lesson: a phrase "to point a moral, or adorn a tale." He was not a reading man, and the maxims of books he disregarded or disbelieved; but in the observations he made for himself he trusted: the lessons he drew from life were never lost upon him, and he acted in consequence of that which he believed, with a decision, vigour, and invariability, seldom found even among philosophers. Of late years he had, in real life, seen striking instances of the treachery of courtiers, and had felt some symptoms of insecurity in the smile of princes. Fortune had been favourable to him—she was fickle—he determined to quit her before she should change. Ambition, it is true, had tempted him—he had risen to her highest pinnacle: he would not be hurled from high—he would descend voluntarily, and with dignity. Lord Oldborough's habits of thought were as different as possible from those of a metaphysician: he had reflected less upon the course of his own mind than upon almost any other subject; but he knew human nature practically; disquisitions on habit, passion, or the sovereign good, were unread by him, nor, in the course of his life, had he ever formed a system, moral or prudential; but the same penetration, the same *longanimity*, which enabled him to govern the affairs of a great nation, gave him, when his attention turned towards himself, a foresight for his own happiness. In the meridian of life, he had cherished ambition, as the only passion that could supply him with motive strong enough to call great powers into great action. But of late years he had felt something, not only of the waywardness of fortune, but of the approaches of

age—not in his mind, but in his health, which had suffered by his exertions. The attacks of hereditary gout had become more violent and more frequent. If he lived, these would, probably, at seasons, often incapacitate him from his arduous ministerial duties: much, that he did well, must be ill done by deputy. He had ever reprobated the practice of leaving the business of the nation to be done by clerks and underlings in office. Yet to this the minister, however able, however honest, must come at last, if he persist in engrossing business and power beyond what an individual can wield. Love for his country, a sense of his own honour, integrity, and consistency, here combined to determine this great minister to retire while it was yet time—to secure, at once, the dignity and happiness of the evening of life. The day had been devoted to good and high purposes—that was enough—he could now, self-satisfied and full of honour, bid adieu to ambition. This resolution, once formed, was fixed. In vain even his sovereign endeavoured to dissuade him from carrying it into execution.

When the king had examined the papers which Lord Oldborough had laid before him, his Majesty sent for his lordship again, and the moment the minister entered the cabinet, his Majesty expressed his perfect satisfaction in seeing that his lordship had, with so little trouble, and with his usual ability, got to the bottom of this affair.

What was to be done next?—The Duke of Greenwich was to be summoned. His grace was in astonishment when he saw the papers which contained Lord Oldborough's complete vindication, and the crimination of Mrs Falconer. Through the whole, as he read on, his grace had but one idea, viz., "commissioner Falconer has deceived me with false intelligence of the intended resignation." Not one

word was said by Lord Oldborough to give his grace hope of that event—till the member of opposition by whom the forged letters had been produced—till all those who knew or had heard anything of the transaction were clearly and fully apprised of the truth. After this was established, and that all saw Lord Oldborough clear and bright in honour, and, at least apparently, as firm in power as he had ever been, to the astonishment of his sovereign his lordship begged permission to resign.

Whatever might have been the effect of misrepresentation to lower Lord Oldborough's favour, at the moment when he spoke of retiring, his king recollected all his past services—all that must, in future, be hazarded and lost in parting with such a minister—so eminent in abilities, of such tried integrity, of such fidelity, such attachment to his person, such a zealous supporter of royalty, such a favourite with his people, so successful as well as so able a minister! Never was he so much valued as at this moment. All his sovereign's early attachment returned in full strength and warmth.

"No, my lord, you must not—you will not leave me."

These simple words, spoken with the warmth of the heart, touched Lord Oldborough more than can be told. It was difficult to resist them, especially when he saw tears in the eyes of the monarch whom he loved.

But his resolution was taken. He thanked his Majesty, not with the commonplace thanks of courtiers, but with his whole heart and soul he thanked his Majesty for this gracious condescension—this testimony of approbation—these proofs of sensibility to his attachment, which paid—overpaid him, in a moment, for the labours of a life. The recollection of them would be

the glory, the solace of his age—could never leave his memory, while life lasted—would, he thought, be present to him, if he should retain his senses, in his dying moment. But he was, in the midst of this strong feeling, firm to the resolution his reason had taken. He humbly represented that he had waited for a favourable time when the affairs of the country were in a prosperous train, when there were few difficulties to embarrass those whom his Majesty might name to succeed to his place at the head of administration: there were many who were ambitious of that station—zeal, talents, and the activity of youth, were at his Majesty's command. For himself, he found it necessary for his health and happiness to retire from public business; and to resign the arduous trust with which he had been honoured.

"My lord, if I must accept of your resignation, I must—but I do it with regret. Is there anything your lordship wishes—anything you will name for yourself or your friends, that I can do, to show my sense of your services and merit?"

"For myself, your Majesty's bounty has left me nothing to wish."

"For your friends, then, my lord?—Let me have the satisfaction of obliging you through them."

Nothing could be more gracious or more gratifying than the whole of this parting audience. It was Lord Oldborough's last audience.

The news of his resignation, quickly whispered at court, was not that day publicly known or announced. The next morning his lordship's door was crowded beyond example in the memory of ministers. Mr Temple, by his lordship's order, announced as soon as possible the minister's having resigned. All were in astonishment—many in sorrow: some few—a very few of the most insignificant of the crowd, persons

incapable of generous sympathy, who thought they could follow their own paltry interests unnoticed—left the room, without paying their farewell respects to this great minister—minister now no more.

The moment he appeared, there was sudden silence. All eyes were fixed upon him, every one pressing to get into the circle.

"Gentlemen, thank you for these marks of attention —of regard. Mr Temple has told you—you know, my friends, that I am a man without power."

"We know," answered a distinguished gentleman, "that you are Lord Oldborough. With or without power, the same in the eyes of your friends, and of the British nation."

Lord Oldborough bowed low, and looked gratified. His lordship then went round the circle with an air more cheerful, more free from reserve, than usual; with something in his manner more of sensibility, but nothing less of dignity. All who merited distinction he distinguished by some few appropriate words, which each remembered afterwards, and repeated to their families and friends. He spoke or listened to each individual with the attention of one who is courting, not quitting, popularity. Free from that restraint and responsibility which his public and ministerial duties had imposed upon him, he now entered into the private concerns of all, and gave his parting assistance or counsel. He noted all grievances—registered all promises that ought to be recommended to the care of his successor in office. The wishes of many, to whom he had forborne to give any encouragement, he now unexpectedly fulfilled and surpassed. When all were satisfied, and had nothing more to ask or to hope from him, they yet delayed, and parted from Lord Oldborough with difficulty and regret.

A proof that justice commands more than any other

quality the respect and gratitude of mankind. Take time and numbers into the calculation, and all discover, in their turn, the advantage of this virtue. This minister, a few regretted instances excepted, had shown no favour, but strict justice, in his patronage.

All Lord Oldborough's requests for his friends were granted—all his recommendations attended to: it was grateful to him to feel that his influence lasted after his power had ceased. Though the sun had apparently set, its parting rays continued to brighten and cheer the prospect.

Under a new minister, Mr Temple declined accepting of the embassy which had been offered to him. Remuneration suitable to his services, and to the high terms in which Lord Oldborough had spoken of his merit, was promised; and without waiting to see in what form or manner this promise would be accomplished, the secretary asked and obtained permission to accompany his revered master to his retirement. Alfred Percy, zealous and ardent in Lord Oldborough's service, the more this great man's character had risen upon his admiration, had already hastened to the country to prepare everything at Clermont Park for his reception. By his orders, that establishment had been retrenched; by Alfred Percy's activity it was restored. Services, which the richest nobleman in the land could not have purchased, or the highest have commanded, Alfred was proud to pay as a voluntary tribute to a noble character.

Lord Oldborough set out for the country at a very early hour in the morning, and no one previously knew his intentions, except Mr Temple. He was desirous to avoid what it had been whispered was the design of the people, to attend him in crowds through the streets of the metropolis.

As they drove out of town Lord Oldborough recol-

lected that in some account, either of the Duke of Marlborough, or the Duke of Ormond's leaving London, after his dismission from court, it is said, that of all those whom the duke had served, all those who had courted and flattered him in the time of his prosperity and power, none showed any gratitude or attachment excepting one page, who appeared at the coach-door as his master was departing, and gave some signs of genuine sorrow and respect.

"I am fortunate," said Lord Oldborough, "in having few complaints to make of ingratitude. I make none. The few I might make," continued his lordship, who now rewarded Mr Temple's approved fidelity, by speaking to him with the openness and confidence of friendship, "the few I might make have been chiefly caused by errors of my own in the choice of the persons I have obliged. I thank Heaven, however, that upon the whole I leave public life not only with a good conscience, but with a good opinion of human nature. I speak not of courtiers—there is nothing of nature about them—they are what circumstances make them. Were I to live my life over again, the hours spent with courtiers are those which I should most wish to be spared; but by a statesman, or a minister, these cannot be avoided. For myself, in resigning my ministerial office, I might say, as Charles the Fifth, when he abdicated, said to his successor, 'I leave you a heavy burthen; for since my shoulders have borne it, I have not passed one day exempt from disquietude.'

"But from the first moment I started in the course of ambition, I was aware that tranquillity must be sacrificed; and to the last moment I abided by the sacrifice. The good I had in view, I have reached—the prize at which I aimed, I have won. The glory of England was my object—her approbation my reward. Generous people!—If ever I bore toil or peril in your cause,

I am rewarded, and never shall you hear me say that 'the unfruitful glories please no more.' The esteem of my sovereign!—I possess it. It is indefeasibly mine. His favour, his smiles, are his to give, or take away. Never shall he hear from me the *wailings* of disappointed ambition."

Chapter xxix.

CAROLINE took advantage of the opportunity of returning home with her brother Alfred, when he went to the country to prepare Clermont Park for the reception of Lord Oldborough. And now she saw her home again with more than wonted delight. Everything animate and inanimate seemed to smile upon her, every heart rejoiced at her return; and she enjoyed equally the pleasure of loving, and of being beloved by, such friends. She had been amused and admired during her residence in London; but a life of dissipation she had always thought, and now she was convinced from experience, could never suit her taste or character. She would immediately have resumed her former occupations, if Rosamond would have permitted; but Rosamond took entire possession of her at every moment when her father or mother had not claimed their prior right to hear and to be heard.

"Caroline, my dear, don't flatter yourself that you shall be left in peace——See!—she is sitting down to write a letter, as if she had not been away from us these six months——You must write to Lady Jane Granville!—Well, finish your gratitude quickly—and no more writing, reading, or drawing, this day; you must think of nothing but talking, or listening to me."

Much as she loved talking in general, Rosamond now so far preferred the pleasure of hearing, that, with her eyes fixed on Caroline, her countenance varying with every variety of Caroline's expression, she sat perfectly silent all the time her sister spoke. And scarcely was her voice heard, even in exclamation. But, during the pauses of narrative, when the pause lasted more than a minute, she would say, "Go on, my dear Caroline, go on. Tell us something more."

The conversation was interrupted by the sudden entrance of Mr Temple — and Rosamond did not immediately find her fluency of speech increase. Mr Temple had seized the first moment that duty and gratitude to his master and friend permitted to hasten to the Hills; nor had Lord Oldborough been unmindful of his feelings. Little as his lordship was disposed to think of love affairs, it seems he recollected those of his secretary; for, the morning after their arrival at Clermont Park, when he proffered his services, Lord Oldborough said, that he had only to trouble Mr Temple to pay a visit for him, if it would not be disagreeable, to his old friend Mr Percy. "Tell him that I know his first wish will be to come to show me that it is the man, not the minister, for whom he had a regard: tell him this proof of his esteem is unnecessary. He will wish to see me for another reason: he is a philosopher—and will have a philosophical curiosity to discover how I exist without ambition. But of that he cannot yet form a judgment—nor can I; therefore, if he pleases, let his visit be delayed till next week. I have some papers to arrange, which I should wish to show him, and I cannot have them sooner in readiness. If you, Mr Temple, can contrive to pass this week at Mr Percy's, let me not detain you. There is no fear," added he, smiling, "that in solitude I should be troubled

by the spectre which haunted the minister in Gil Blas in his retirement."

Never was man happier than Mr Temple, when he found himself in the midst of the family circle at the Hills, and seated beside Rosamond, free from all cares, all business, all intrigues of courtiers, and restraints of office; no longer in the horrors of attendance and dependence, but with the promise of a competent provision for life—with the consciousness of its having been honourably obtained; and, to brighten all, the hope, the delightful hope, of soon prevailing on the woman he loved to become his for ever.

Alfred Percy had been obliged to return directly to London, and for once in his life Mr Temple profited by the absence of his friend. In the small house at the Hills, Alfred's was the only room that could have been spared for him; and in this room, scarcely fourteen feet square, the ex-secretary found himself lodged more entirely to his satisfaction than he had ever been in the sumptuous apartments of the great. The happy are not fastidious as to their accommodations; they never miss the painted ceiling, or the long arcade, and their slumbers require no bed of down. The lover's only fear was, that this happy week would pass too swiftly; and, indeed, time flew unperceived by him, and by Rosamond. One fine day, after dinner, Mrs Percy proposed, that instead of sitting longer in the house, they should have their dessert of strawberries in some pleasant place in the lawn or wood. Rosamond eagerly seconded this proposal, and whispered, "Caroline's bower."

Thither they went. This bower of Caroline, this favourite spot, Rosamond, during her sister's absence, had taken delight in ornamenting, and it did credit as much to her taste as to her kindness. She had opened a view on one side to a waterfall among the rocks; on

the other, to a winding path descending through the glen. Honeysuckle, rose, and eglantine, near the bower, were in rich and wild profusion; all these, the song of birds, and even the smell of the new-mown grass, seemed peculiarly delightful to Mr Temple. Of late years, he had been doomed to close confinement in a capital city; but all his tastes were rural, and, as he said, he feared he should expose himself to the ridicule Dr Johnson throws on those "who talk of sheep and goats, and who babble of green fields."

Mr Percy thought Dr Johnson was rather too intolerant of rural description, and of the praises of a country life, but acknowledged that he quite agreed with him in disliking pastorals—excepting always that beautiful drama, "The Gentle Shepherd." Mr Percy said that, in his opinion, a life purely pastoral must, if it could be realised, prove as insufferably tiresome in reality as it usually is found to be in fiction. He hated Delias and shepherdesses, and declared that he should soon grow tired of any companion with whom he had no other occupation in common but "*tending a few sheep.*" There was a vast difference, he thought, between pastoral and domestic life. His idea of domestic life comprised all the varieties of literature, exercise, and amusement for the faculties, with the delights of cultivated society.

The conversation turned from pastoral life and pastorals to Scotch and English ballads and songs. Their various merits of simplicity, pathos, or elegance, were compared and discussed. After the "Reliques of Ancient Poetry" had been sufficiently admired, Rosamond and Caroline mentioned two modern compositions, both by the same author, each exquisite in its different style of poetry—one beautiful, the other sublime. Rosamond's favourite was "The Exile of Erin;" Caroline's, "The Mariners of England." To justify their

tastes, they repeated the poems. Caroline fixed the attention of the company on the flag which has

"Braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze,"

when suddenly her own attention seemed to be distracted by some object in the glen below. She endeavoured to go on, but her voice faltered—her colour changed. Rosamond, whose quick eye followed her sister's, instantly caught a glimpse of a gentleman coming up the path from the glen. Rosamond started from her seat, and clasping her hands, exclaimed, "It is! It *is* he!—It is Count Altenberg!"

They had not recovered from their astonishment when Count Altenberg stood before them. To Mr Percy, to Mrs Percy, to Rosamond, to each he spoke, before he said one word to Caroline. But one look had said all, had spoken, and had been understood.

That he was not married she was certain—for that look said he loved her—and her confidence in his honour was secure. Whatever had delayed his return, or had been mysterious in his conduct, she felt convinced that he had never been to blame.

And on his part did he read as distinctly the truth in her countenance?—Was the high colour, the radiant pleasure in that countenance unmarked? The joy was so veiled by feminine modesty, that he doubted, trembled, and if at last the rapid feelings ended in hope, it was respectful hope. With deference the most marked, mingled with dignity, tenderness, and passion, he approached Caroline. He was too delicate, too well-bred, to distress her by distinguishing her more particularly; but as he took the seat, which she left for him beside her mother, the open and serene expression of her eye, with the soft sound of her voice, in the few words she answered to what he said, were enough to set his heart at ease. The sight of Mr Temple had

at first alarmed the count, but the alarm was only momentary. One glance at Rosamond reassured him.

Ideas, which it requires many words to tell, passed instantaneously with the rapidity of light. After they were seated, some minutes were spent in commonplace questions and answers, such as those which Benjamin Franklin would wisely put all together, into one formula, to satisfy curiosity. Count Altenberg landed the preceding day—had not stopped to see any one in England—had not even heard of Lord Oldborough's resignation—had proceeded directly to the Hills—had left his equipage at a town a few miles distant—thought he had been fully master of the well-known road, but the approach having been lately changed, he had missed his way.

This settled, to make room for a more interesting explanation, Mr Temple had the politeness to withdraw. Rosamond had the humanity, and Caroline the discretion, to accompany him in his walk.

Count Altenberg then said, addressing himself to Mr Percy, on whose regard he seemed to have reliance, and to Mrs Percy, whom he appeared most anxious to interest in his favour, "You certainly, sir, as a man of penetration, and a father; you, madam, as a mother, and as a lady who must have been accustomed to the admiration of our sex, could not avoid seeing, when I was in this country before, that I felt the highest admiration, that I had formed the strongest attachment for your daughter—Miss Caroline Percy."

Mr and Mrs Percy both acknowledged that they thought Count Altenberg had shown some preference for Caroline; but as he had never declared his attachment, they had not felt themselves justified in inferring more from his attentions than his general good opinion. A change in his manner, which they observed shortly before they quitted Hungerford Castle, had impressed

them with the idea that he had no such views as they had once been led to imagine, and their never having heard anything from him since had confirmed them in this belief.

"Painful—exquisitely painful, as it was to me," said Count Altenberg, "I felt myself bound in honour to leave you in that error, and at all hazards to myself to suffer you to continue under that persuasion, as I was then, and have been till within these few days, in dread of being obliged to fulfil an engagement, made without my concurrence or knowledge, and which must for ever have precluded me from indulging the first wish of my heart. The moment, literally the moment I was at liberty, I hastened hither, to declare my real sentiments, and to solicit your permission to address your daughter. But before I can expect that permission, before I can hope for your approbation of my suit—an approbation which, I am well aware, must depend entirely upon your opinion of my character—I must, to explain whatever may have appeared unintelligible in my conduct, be permitted to make you fully acquainted with the circumstances in which I have been placed."

Beginning with the history of his father's letters and his own, respecting the projected marriage with the Countess Christina, he related, nearly as follows, all that passed, after his having, in obedience to his father's summons, returned home. He found contracts drawn up and ready for his signature—the friends of both families apprised of the proposed alliance, and everything actually prepared for his marriage. Remonstrances with his father were vain. The old count said that it was impossible to break off the match, that his honour and the honour of his house was pledged. But independently of all promises, he considered the accomplishment of this marriage as

most desirable and advantageous: with all the vehemence of affection, and all the force of parental authority, he charged his son to fulfil his engagements. The old count was a fond but an imperious father; a good but an ambitious man. It was his belief that love is such a transient passion, that it is folly to sacrifice to its indulgence any of the solid and permanent interests of life. His experience at courts, and his observation on the gallantries of young princes and nobles, had taught him to believe that love is not only a transient, but a variable and capricious feeling, easily changing its object, and subsisting only by novelty. All that his son said of his attachment to Caroline, of the certainty of its permanence, and of its being essential to the happiness of his life, the father heard but as the common language of every enamoured youth. He let his son speak without interruption, but smiled incredulous, and listened only as to the voice of one in the paroxysm of a passion, which, however violent, would necessarily subside. Between the fits, he endeavoured to control the fever of his mind, and as a spell repeated these words, "Albert! see the young Countess Christina—but once—I ask no more."

Albert, with the respect due to a father, but with the firmness due to himself, and with all the courage which love only could have given to oppose the authority and affection of a parent, refused to ratify the contract that had been prepared, and declined the proposed interview. He doubted not, he said, that the lady was all his father described—beautiful, amiable, and of transcendent talents; he doubted not her power to win any but a heart already won. He would enter into no invidious comparisons, nor bid defiance to her charms—his own choice was made, he was sure of his constancy, and he thought it not only the most honourable course, but the most respectful to the Lady

Christina, ingenuously at once, and without having any interview with her, or her friends, to state the truth—that the treaty had been commenced by his father without his knowledge, and carried on under total ignorance of an attachment he had formed in England. The father, after some expressions of anger and disappointment, was silent, and appeared to acquiesce. He no longer openly urged the proposed interview, but he secretly contrived that it should take place. At a masked ball at court, Count Albert entered into conversation with a Minerva, whose majestic air and figure distinguished her above her companions, whose language, thoughts, and sentiments, perfectly sustained the character which she assumed. He was struck with admiration by her talents, and by a certain elevation of thought and sentiment, which, in all she said, seemed the habitual expression of a real character, not the strained language of a feigned personage. She took off her mask—he was dazzled by her beauty. They were at this moment surrounded by numbers of her friends and of his, who were watching the effect produced by this interview. His father, satisfied by the admiration he saw in Count Albert's countenance, when they both took off their masks, approached and whispered, "The Countess Christina." Count Altenberg grew pale, and for a moment stood in silent consternation. The lady smiled with an air of haughty superiority, which in some degree relieved him, by calling his own pride to his aid, and by convincing him that tenderness, or feminine timidity, which he would have most dreaded to wound, were not the characteristics of her mind. He instantly asked permission to pay his respects to her at her father's palace the ensuing day. She changed colour—darted a penetrating glance at the count; and after an incomprehensible and quick alternation of pleasure and pain

in her countenance, she replied, that "she consented to grant Count Albert Altenberg that interview which he and their mutual friends desired." She then retired with friends from the assembly.

In spite of the haughtiness of her demeanour, it had been obvious that she had desired to make an impression upon Count Albert; and all who knew her agreed that she had never on any occasion been seen to exert herself so much to shine and please. She shone, but had not pleased. The father, however, was content; an interview was promised—he trusted to the charms and talents of the countess—he trusted to her flattering desire to captivate, and with impatience and confidence he waited for the event of the succeeding day. Some intervening hours, a night of feverish and agonizing suspense, would have been spared to Count Albert, had he at this time known anything of an intrigue—an intrigue which an artful enemy had been carrying on, with design to mortify, disgrace, and ruin his house. The plan was worthy of him by whom it was formed—M. de Tourville—a person, between whom and Count Albert there seemed an incompatibility of character, and even of manner; an aversion openly, indiscreetly shown by the count, even from his boyish years, but cautiously concealed on the part of M. de Tourville, masked in courtly smiles and a diplomatic air of perfect consideration. Fear mixed with M. de Tourville's dislike. He was aware that if Count Albert continued in confidence with the hereditary prince, he would, when the prince should assume the reins of government, become, in all probability, his prime minister, and then adieu to all M. de Tourville's hopes of rising to favour and fortune. Fertile in the resources of intrigue, gallant and political, he combined them, upon this occasion, with exquisite address. When the Countess Christina was first presented at

court, he had observed that the prince was struck by her beauty. M. de Tourville took every means that a courtier well knows how to employ, to flatter the taste by which he hoped to profit. In secret he insinuated into the lady's ears that she was admired by the prince. M. de Tourville knew her to be of an aspiring character, and rightly judged that ambition was her strongest passion. When once the hope of captivating the prince had been suggested to her, she began to disdain the proposed alliance with the house of Altenberg; but she concealed this disdain, till she could show it with security: she played her part with all the ability, foresight, and consummate prudence, of which ambition, undisturbed by love, is capable. Many obstacles opposed her views: the projected marriage with Count Albert Altenberg—the certainty that the reigning prince would never consent to his son's forming an alliance with the daughter of a subject. But the old prince was dying, and the Lady Christina calculated that till his decease she could protract the time appointed for her marriage with Count Albert. The young prince might then break off the projected match, prevail upon the emperor to create her a princess of the empire, and then, without derogating from his rank, or giving offence to German ideas of propriety, he might gratify his passion, and accomplish the fulness of her ambition. Determined to take no counsel but her own, she never opened her scheme to any of her friends, but pursued her plan secretly, in concert with M. de Tourville, whom she considered but as a humble instrument devoted to her service. He all the while, considering her merely as a puppet, played by his art, to secure at once the purposes of his interest and of his hatred. He thought he foresaw that Count Albert would never yield his intended bride peaceably to his prince—he knew nothing of the count's attachment in England—

the Lady Christina was charming—the alliance highly advantageous to the house of Altenberg—the breaking off such a marriage, and the disappointment of a passion which he thought the young countess could not fail to inspire, would, as M. de Tourville hoped, produce an irreparable breach between the prince and his favourite. On Count Albert's return from England, symptoms of alarm and jealousy had appeared in the prince, unmarked by all but by the Countess Christina, and by the confidant, who was in the secret of his passion.

So far M. de Tourville's scheme had prospered, and from the character of the hereditary prince, it was likely to succeed in its ultimate view. He was a prince of good dispositions, but wanting in resolution and civil courage: capable of resisting the allurements of pleasure for a certain time, but soon weary of painful endurance in any cause; with a taste for virtue, but destitute of that power to bear and forbear, without which there is no virtue: a hero, when supported by a stronger mind, such as that of his friend, Count Albert; but relaxing and sinking at once, when exposed to the influence of a flatterer, such as M. de Tourville: subject to exquisite shame and self-reproach, when he had acted contrary to his own idea of right; yet, from the very same weakness that made him err, disposed to be obstinate in error. M. de Tourville argued well from his knowledge of his character that the prince, enamoured as he was of the charms of the fair Christina, would not long be able to resist his passion; and that, if once he broke through his sense of honour, and declared that passion to the destined bride of his friend, he would ever afterwards shun and detest the man whom he had injured. All this M. de Tourville had admirably well combined: no man understood and managed better the weaknesses of human nature, but its strength he could not so well

estimate; and as for generosity, as he could not believe in its sincerity, he was never prepared for its effects. The struggles which the prince made against his passion were greater, and of longer duration, than M. de Tourville had expected. If Count Albert had continued absent, the prince might have been brought more easily to betray him; but his return recalled, in the midst of love and jealousy, the sense of respect he had for the superior character of this friend of his early days: he knew the value of a friend—even at the moment he yielded his faith to a flatterer. He could not at once forfeit the esteem of the being who esteemed him most—he could not sacrifice the interest, and as he thought the happiness, of the man who loved him best. The attachment his favourite had shown him, his truth, his confiding openness of temper, the pleasure in his countenance when he saw him first upon his return from England, all these operated on the heart of the prince, and no declaration of his passion had been made at the time when the appointed interview took place between Count Albert and the Countess Christina at her father's palace. Her friends, not doubting that her marriage was on the eve of its accomplishment, had no scruple, even in that court of etiquette, in permitting the affianced lovers to have as private a conference as each seemed to desire. The lady's manner was this morning most alarmingly gracious. Count Albert was, however, struck by a difference in her air, the moment she was alone with him, from what it had been whilst in the presence of her friends. All that he might without vanity have interpreted as marking a desire to please, to show him favour, and to evince her approbation, at least, of the choice her friends had made for her, vanished the moment they withdrew. What her motives might be, Count Altenberg could not guess;

but the hope he now felt, that she was not really inclined to consider him with partiality, rendered it more easy to enter into that explanation, upon which he was, at all events, resolved. With all the delicacy due to her sex, with all the deference due to her character, and all the softenings by which politeness can soothe and conciliate pride, he revealed to the Countess Christina the real state of his affections: he told her the whole truth, concluding by repeating the assurance of his belief that her charms and merit would be irresistible to any heart that was disengaged.

The lady heard him in astonishment: for this turn of fate she had been wholly unprepared—the idea of his being attached to another had never once presented itself to her imagination; she had never calculated on the possibility that her alliance should be declined by any individual of a family less than sovereign. She possessed, however, pride of character superior to her pride of rank, and strength of mind suited to the loftiness of her ambition. With dignity in her air and countenance, after a pause of reflection, she replied, "Count Albert Altenberg is, I find, equal to the high character I have heard of him: deserving of my esteem and confidence, by that which can alone command esteem and merit confidence—sincerity. His example has recalled me to my nobler self, and he has, in this moment, rescued me from the labyrinth of a diplomatist. Count Albert's sincerity I—little accustomed to imitation, but proud to *follow* in what is good and great—shall imitate. Know then, sir, that my heart, like your own, is engaged: and that you may be convinced I do not mock your ear with the semblance of confidence, I shall, at whatever hazard to myself, trust to you my secret. My affections have a high object—are fixed upon him whose friend and favourite Count Albert Altenberg deservedly is. I should scorn

myself—no throne upon earth could raise me in my own opinion, if I could deceive or betray the man who has treated me with such sincerity."

Relieved at once by this explanation, and admiring the manner in which it was made, mingled joy and admiration were manifest in his countenance; and the lady forgave him the joy, in consideration of the tribute he paid to her superiority. Admiration was a tribute he was most willing to yield at this moment, when released from that engagement to love which it had been impossible for him to fulfil.

The countess recalled his attention to her affairs and to his own. Without his making any inquiry, she told him all that had been done, and all that yet remained to be done, for the accomplishment of her hopes: she had been assured, she said, by one now in the favour and private confidence of the hereditary prince, that his inclination for her was—painfully and with struggles, which, in her eyes, made his royal heart worthy her conquest—suppressed by a sense of honour to his friend.

"This conflict would now cease," Count Albert said. "It should be his immediate care to relieve his prince from all difficulty on his account."

"By what means?" the countess asked.

"Simply by informing him of the truth—as far as I am concerned. Your secret, madam, is safe—your confidence sacred. Of all that concerns myself—my own attachment, and the resignation of any pretensions that might interfere with his, he shall immediately be acquainted with the whole truth."

The countess coloured, and repeating the words "*the whole truth*," looked disconcerted, and in great perplexity replied, that Count Albert's speaking to the prince directly—his immediate resignation of his pretensions—would, perhaps, defeat her plans. This

was not the course she had intended to pursue—far from that which M. de Tourville had pointed out. After some moments' reflection, she said, "I abide by the truth—speak to the prince—be it so: I trust to your honour and discretion to speak to him in such terms as not to implicate me, to commit my delicacy, or to derogate from my dignity. We shall see then whether he loves me as I desire to be loved. If he does, he will free me, at once, from all difficulty with my friends, for he will speak *en prince*—and not speak in vain; if he loves me not, I need not tell you, sir, that you are equally free. My friends shall be convinced that I will never be the bride of any other man."

After the explanation with the Lady Christina, Count Albert lost no time; he went instantly to the palace. In his way thither, he was met by one of the pages, who told him the prince desired to see him immediately. He found the prince alone. Advancing to meet him, with great effort in his manner to command his emotion, the prince said, "I have sent for you, Count Albert, to give you a proof that the friendship of princes is not, in every instance, so vain a thing as it is commonly believed to be. Mine for you has withstood strong temptation:—you come from the Countess Christina, I believe, and can measure, better than any one, the force of that temptation. Know that in your absence it has been my misfortune to become passionately enamoured of your destined bride; but I have never, either by word or look, directly or indirectly, infringed on what I felt to be due to your friendship and to my own honour. Never did I give her the slightest intimation of my passion, never attempted to take any of the advantages which my situation might be supposed to give."

Count Albert had just received the most convincing testimony corroborating these assertions—he was going to express his sense of the conduct of his prince, and to explain his own situation, but the prince went on speaking with the eagerness of one who fears his own resolution, who has to say something which he dreads that he should not be able to resume or finish, if his feelings should meet with any interruption.

"And now let me, as your friend and prince, congratulate you, Count Albert, on your happiness; and, with the same sincerity, I request that your marriage may not be delayed, and that you will take your bride immediately away from my father's court. Time will, I hope, render her presence less dangerous; time will, I hope, enable me to enjoy your society in safety; and when it shall become my duty to govern this state, I shall hope for the assistance of your talents and integrity, and shall have deserved, in some degree, your attachment."

The count, in the strongest manner, expressed his gratitude to his prince for these proofs of his regard, given under circumstances the most trying to the human heart. He felt, at this instant, exquisite pleasure in revealing to his highness the truth, in showing him that the sacrifice he had so honourably, so generously determined to make, was not requisite, that their affections were fixed on different objects, that before Count Albert had any idea of the prince's attachment to the Lady Christina, it had been his ardent wish, his determination, at all hazards, to break off engagements which he could not fulfil.

The prince was in rapturous joy—all his ease of manner towards his friend returned instantly, his affection and confidence flowed in full tide. Proud of himself, and happy in the sense of the imminent

danger from which he had escaped, he now described the late conflicts his heart had endured with the eloquence of self-complacency, and with that sense of relief which is felt in speaking on the most interesting of all subjects to a faithful friend from whom a secret has been painfully concealed. The prince now threw open every thought, every feeling of his mind. Count Altenberg rose higher than ever in his favour: not the temporary favourite of the moment—the companion of pleasures—the flatterer of present passion or caprice; but the friend in whom there is certainty of sympathy, and security of counsel. The prince, confiding in Count Albert's zeal and superior powers, now took advice from him, and made a confidant no longer of M. de Tourville. The very means which that intriguing courtier had taken to undermine the count thus eventually proved the cause of establishing more firmly his credit. The plain sincerity of the count, and the generous magnanimity of the lady, at once disconcerted and destroyed the artful plan of the diplomatist. M. de Tourville's disappointment when he heard from the Countess Christina the result of her interview with Count Albert, and the reproaches which in that moment of vexation he could not refrain from uttering against the lady for having departed from their plan, and having trusted to the count, unveiled to her the meanness of his character and the baseness of his designs. She plainly saw that his object had been not to assist her love, but to gratify his own hate: not merely to advance his own fortune—that, she knew, must be the first object of every courtier—but "to rise upon the ruins of another's fame;" and this, she determined, should never be accomplished by her assistance, or with her connivance. She put Count Albert on his guard against this insidious enemy.

The count, grateful to the lady, yet biassed neither by hope of her future favour nor by present desire to please, firm in honour and loyalty to the prince who asked his counsel, carefully studied the character of the Countess Christina, to determine whether she possessed the qualities fit for the high station to which love was impatient that she should be elevated. When he was convinced that her character was such as was requisite to ensure the private happiness of the prince, to excite him to the attainment of true glory—then, and not till then, he decidedly advised the marriage, and zealously offered any assistance in his power to promote the union. The hereditary prince about this time became, by the death of his father, sole master of his actions; but it was not prudent to begin his government with an act in open defiance of the prejudices or customs of his country. By these customs, he could not marry any woman under the rank of a princess; and the emperor had been known to refuse conferring this rank, even on favourites of powerful potentates, by whom he had been in the most urgent manner solicited. Count Albert Altenberg stood high in the esteem of the emperor, at whose court he had spent some time; and his prince now commissioned him to go to Vienna, and endeavour to move the emperor to concede this point in his favour. This embassy was a new and terrible delay to the count's anxious desire of returning to England. But he had offered his services, and he gave them generously. He repaired to Vienna, and persevering through many difficulties, at length succeeded in obtaining for the countess the rank of princess. The attachment of the prince was then publicly declared—the marriage was solemnized—all approved of the prince's choice—all—except the envious, who never approve of the happy. Count Albert received, both from the prince and princess, the highest marks of esteem

and favour. M. de Tourville, detected and despised, retired from court in disgrace and in despair.

Immediately after his marriage, the prince declared his intention of appointing Count Albert Altenberg his prime minister; but before he entered on the duties of his office, and the very moment that he could be spared by his prince, he asked and obtained permission to return to England, to the lady on whom his affections were fixed. The old count, his father, satisfied with the turn which affairs had taken, and gratified in his utmost ambition by seeing his son minister of state, now willingly permitted him to follow his own inclination in the choice of a wife. "And," concluded Count Albert, "my father rejoices that my heart is devoted to an Englishwoman: having himself married an English lady, he knows, from experience, how to appreciate the domestic merits of the ladies of England; he is prepossessed in their favour. He agrees, indeed, with foreigners of every nation, who have had opportunities of judging, and who all allow that—next to their own countrywomen—the English are the most charming and the most amiable women in the world."

When the count had finished, and had pronounced this panegyric of a nation, while he thought only of an individual, he paused, anxious to know what effect his narrative had produced on Mr and Mrs Percy.

He was gratified both by their words and looks, which gave him full assurance of their entire satisfaction.

"And since he had done them the honour of appealing to their opinion, they might be permitted to add their complete approbation of every part of his conduct, in the difficult circumstances in which he had been placed. They were fully sensible of the high honour that such a man as Count Altenberg conferred on their daughter by his preference. As to the rest, they must refer him to Caroline herself." Mr Percy

said with a grave voice, but with a smile from which the count augured well, "that even for the most advantageous and, in his opinion, desirable connexion, he would not influence his daughter's inclination.—Caroline must decide."

The count, with all the persuasive tenderness and energy of truth and love, pleaded his own cause, and was heard by Caroline with a modest, dignified, ingenuous sensibility, which increased his passion. Her partiality was now heightened by her conviction of the strength and steadiness of his attachment; but whilst she acknowledged how high he stood in her esteem, and did not attempt to conceal the impression he had made on her heart, yet he saw that she dreaded to yield to the passion which must at last require from her the sacrifice of her home, country, friends, and parents. As long as the idea of being united to him was faint and distant, so was the fear of the sacrifices that union might demand; but now the hope, the fear, the certainty, at once pressed on her heart with the most agitating urgency. The count as far as possible relieved her mind by the assurance that though his duty to his prince and his father, that though all his private and public connexions and interests obliged him to reside some time in Germany, yet that he could occasionally visit England, that he should seize every opportunity of visiting a country he preferred to all others; and, for his own sake, he should cultivate the friendship of her family, as each individual was in different ways suited to his taste and stood high in his esteem.

Caroline listened with fond anxiety to these hopes: she was willing to believe in promises which she was convinced were made with entire sincerity; and when her affections had been wrought to this point, when her resolution was once determined, she never afterwards

tormented the man to whom she was attached with wavering doubts and scruples.

Count Altenberg's promise to his prince obliged him to return at an appointed time. Caroline wished that time had been more distant; she would have delighted in spending the spring-time of love in the midst of those who had formed till now all the happiness of her life—with her parents, to whom she owed everything, to whom her gratitude was as warm, as strong, as her affection—with her beloved sister, who had sympathized so tenderly in all her sorrow, and who ardently wished to have some time allowed to enjoy her happiness. Caroline felt all this, but she felt too deeply to display feeling: sensible of what the duty and honour of Count Altenberg demanded, she asked for no delay.

The first letters that were written to announce her intended marriage were to Mrs Hungerford and to Lady Jane Granville. And it may be recorded as a fact rather unusual, that Caroline was so fortunate as to satisfy all her friends: not to offend one of her relations, by telling any too soon, or too late, of her intentions. In fact, she made no secret, no mystery, where none was required by good sense or propriety. Nor did she communicate it under a strict injunction of secrecy to twenty friends, who were afterwards each to be angry with the other for having, or not having, told that of which they were forbidden to speak. The order of precedency in Caroline's confidential communications was approved even by all the parties concerned.

Mrs Hungerford was at Pembroke with her nieces when she received Caroline's letter: her answer was as follows:—

"My dear Child,

"I am ten years younger since I read your letter, therefore do not be surprised at the quickness of my

motions—I shall be with you at the Hills, in town, or wherever you are, as soon as it is possible, after you let me know when and where I can embrace you and our dear count. At the marriage of my niece, Lady Mary Barclay, your mother will remember that I prayed to Heaven I might live to see my beloved Caroline united to the man of her choice—I am grateful that this blessing, this completion of all my earthly hopes and happiness, has been granted to me.

"M. Elizabeth Hungerford."

The answer of Lady Jane Granville came next.

"*Confidential.*

"This is the last *confidential* letter I shall ever be able to write to you—for a married woman's letters, you know, or you will soon know, become, like all the rest of her property, subject to her husband—excepting always the secrets of which she was possessed before marriage, which do not go into the common stock, if she be a woman of honour—so I am safe with you, Caroline; and any erroneous opinion I might have formed, or any hasty expressions I may have let drop, about a certain count, you will bury in oblivion, and never let me see you look even as if you recollected to have heard them.

"You were right, my dear, in that whole business—I was wrong; and all I can say for myself is, that I was wrong with the best possible intentions. I now congratulate you with as sincere joy as if this charming match had been made by my advice, under my *chaperonage*, and by favour of that *patronage of fashion*, of which I know your father thinks that both my *head* and *heart* are full; there he is only half right, after

all: so do not let him be too proud. I will not allow that my heart is ever wrong, certainly not where you are concerned.

"I am impatient, my dear Caroline, to see your Count Altenberg. I heard him most highly spoken of yesterday by a Polish nobleman, whom I met at dinner at the Duke of Greenwich's. Is it true, that the count is to be prime minister of the Prince of * * *? The Duke of Greenwich asked me this question, and I promised I would let his grace know from *the best possible* authority—but I did not *commit* you.

"And now, my dear, for my own interest. If you have really and cordially forgiven me, for having so rashly said, upon a late occasion, that I would never forgive you, prove to me your placability and your sincerity—use your all-powerful influence to obtain for me a favour on which I have set my heart. Will you prevail on all your house to come up to town directly, and take possession of mine?—Count Altenberg, you say, has business to transact with ministers; whilst this is going on, and whilst the lawyers are settling preliminaries, where can you all be better than with me? I hope I shall be able to make Mr and Mrs Percy feel as much at home, in one hour's time, as I found myself the first evening after my arrival at the Hills some years ago.

"I know the Hungerfords will press you to go to them, and Alfred and Mrs A. Percy will plead *nearest of kin*—I can only throw myself upon your generosity. The more inducements you have to go to other friends, the more I shall feel gratified and obliged, if you favour me with this proof of your preference and affection. Indulge me, my dear Caroline, perhaps, for the last time, with your company, of which, believe me, I have, though a woman of the world, sense and feeling sufficient fully to appreciate

the value. Yours (at all events), ever and affectionately,

"J. GRANVILLE.

"*Spring Gardens—Tuesday.*

"P.S.—I hope your father is of my opinion, that weddings, especially among persons of a certain rank of life, ought always to be *public*—attended by the friends and connexions of the families, and conducted with something of the good old aristocratic formality, pomp, and state, of former times."

Lady Jane Granville's polite and urgent request was granted. Caroline and all her family had pleasure in showing Lady Jane that they felt grateful for her kindness.

Mr Temple obtained permission from Lord Oldborough to accompany the Percys to town; and it was settled that Rosamond and Caroline should be married on the same day.

But the morning after their arrival in London, Mr Temple appeared with a countenance very unlike that which had been seen the night before—Hope and joy had fled!—All pale and in consternation!—Rosamond was ready to die with terror. She was relieved when he declared that the evil related only to his fortune. The place that had been promised to him was given, indeed—the word of promise was kept to the ear—but by some management, either of Lord Skreene's or Lord Skrimpshire's, the place had been *saddled* with a pension to the widow of the gentleman by whom it had been previously held, and the amount of this pension was such as to reduce the profits of the place to an annual income by no means sufficient to secure independence, or even competence, to a married man. Mr Temple knew that when the facts were

stated to Lord Oldborough, his lordship would, by his representations to the highest authority, obtain redress; but the secretary was unwilling to implicate him in this disagreeable affair, unwilling to trouble his tranquillity again with court-intrigues, especially, as Mr Temple said, where his own personal interest alone was concerned — at any rate this business must delay his marriage. Count Altenberg could not possibly defer the day named for his wedding—despatches from the Continent pressed the absolute necessity of his return. Revolutionary symptoms had again appeared in the city —his prince could not dispense with his services. His honour was at stake.

Mr Temple did not attempt or pretend to bear his disappointment like a philosopher: he bore it like a lover, that is to say, very ill. Rosamond, poor Rosamond, rallied him with as much gaiety as she could command with a very heavy heart.

After a little time for reflection, her good sense, which, when called upon to act, never failed to guide her conduct, induced her to exert decisive influence to prevent Mr Temple from breaking out into violent complaints against those in power, by whom he had been ill-treated.

The idea of being married on the same day with her sister, she said, after all, was a mere childish fancy, for which no solid advantage should be hazarded; therefore she conjured her lover not in heat of passion to precipitate things, but patiently to wait—to return and apply to Lord Oldborough, if he should find that the representations he had already made to Lord Skrimpshire failed of effect. With much reluctance Mr Temple submitted to postpone the day promised for his marriage; but both Mr and Mrs Percy so strongly supported Rosamond's arguments, that he was compelled to be prudent. Rosa-

mond now thought only of her sister's approaching nuptials. Mrs Hungerford and Mrs Mortimer arrived in town, and all Mr and Mrs Percy's troops of friends gathered round them for this joyful occasion.

Lady Jane Granville was peculiarly happy in finding that Mr Percy agreed with her in opinion that marriages ought to be publicly solemnized; and rejoiced that, when Caroline should be led to the altar by the man of her choice, she would feel that choice sanctioned by the approbation of her assembled family and friends. Lady Jane justly observed, that it was advantageous to mark as strongly as possible the difference between marriages with consent of friends, and clandestine unions, which from their very nature must always be as private as possible.

If some little love of show, and some aristocratic pride of family, mixed with Lady Jane's good sense upon this as upon most other occasions, the truly philosophic will be inclined to pardon her; for they best know how much of all the principles which form the strength and happiness of society depends upon mixed motives.

Mr and Mrs Percy, grateful to Lady Jane, and willing to indulge her affection in its own way, gratified her with permission to arrange the whole ceremonial of the wedding.

Now that Rosamond's marriage was postponed, she claimed first right to be her sister's bridemaid; Lady Florence Pembroke, Mrs Hungerford's niece, had made her request, and obtained Caroline's promise, to be the second; and these were all that Caroline desired to have: but Lady Jane Granville evidently wished for the honour and glory of Lady Frances Arlington for a third, because she was niece to the Duke of Greenwich; and besides, as Lady Jane pleaded, "though a little selfish, she really would have been

generous, if she had not been spoiled: to be sure, she cared in general for no one but herself; yet she absolutely showed particular interest about Caroline. *Besides*, her ladyship had set her heart upon the matter, and never would forgive a disappointment of a fancy." Her ladyship's request was granted. Farther than this affair of the three bridemaids we know not—there is no record concerning who were the bridemen. But before we come to the wedding-day, we think it necessary to mention, for the satisfaction of the prudent part of the world, that the settlements were duly signed, sealed, and delivered, in the presence of proper witnesses.

At the moment of recording this fact, we are well aware that as much as we shall gain in the esteem of the old, we shall lose in the opinion of the young. We must therefore be satisfied with the nod of approbation from parents, and must endure the smile of scorn from lovers. We know that

> "Jointure, portion, gold, estate,
> Houses, household-stuff, or land,
> The low conveniences of fate,
> Are Greek no lovers understand."

We regret that we cannot gratify some of our courteous readers with a detailed account of the marriage of Caroline and Count Altenberg, with a description of the wedding-dresses, or a list of the company, who, after the ceremony, partook of an elegant collation at Lady Jane Granville's house in Spring Gardens. We lament that we cannot even furnish a paragraph in honour of Count Altenberg's equipage.

After all their other friends had made their congratulations, had taken leave of Caroline, and had departed, Mrs Hungerford and Mrs Mortimer still lingered.

"I know, my love," said Mrs Hungerford, "I ought to resign you, in these last moments, to your parents, your brothers, your own Rosamond; yet I have some excuse for my selfishness—they will see you again, it is to be hoped, often——But I!—that is not in the course of nature: the blessing I scarcely could have expected to live to enjoy has been granted to me. And now that I have seen you united to one worthy of you, one who knows your value, I am content—I am grateful. Farewell, again and again, my beloved Caroline, may every——"

Tears spoke the rest. Turning from Caroline, she leaned on Count Altenberg's arm; as he conducted her to her carriage, "You are a happy man, Count Altenberg," said she: "forgive me, if I am not able to congratulate you as I ought——Daughter Mortimer, you know my heart—speak for me, if you can."

Count Altenberg was more touched by this strong affection for Caroline than he could have been by any congratulatory compliments to himself. After the departure of Mrs Hungerford and Mrs Mortimer, came the separation so much dreaded by all the family, for which all stood prepared. Despising and detesting the display of sensibility, they had fortified themselves for this moment with all their resolution, and each struggled to repress their own feelings.

Count Altenberg had delayed till the last moment. It was now necessary that they should set out. Caroline, flushed crimson to the very temples one instant, and pale the next, commanded with the utmost effort her emotion; Rosamond, unable to repress hers, clung to her sister weeping. Caroline's lips quivered with a vain attempt to speak—she could only embrace Rosamond repeatedly, and then her mother. Her father pressed her to his bosom—blessed her—and then drawing her arm within his led her to her husband.

As they passed through the hall, the faithful housekeeper, and the old steward, who had come from the country to the marriage, pressed forward, in hopes of a last look. Caroline stopped, and took leave of each. She was able, though with difficulty, to speak, and she thanked them for all the services and kindness she had received from them from childhood to this hour: then her father led her to the carriage.

"It is the order of nature, my dear child," said he: "we are fond but not selfish parents; your happiness is gained by the sacrifice, and we can part with you."

Chapter xl.

SOME sage moralist has observed that even in the accomplishment of our most ardent wishes in this world, there is always some circumstance that disappoints our expectations, or mixes somewhat of pain with the joy. "This is perfectly true," thought Rosamond. "How often have I wished for Caroline's marriage with Count Altenberg—and now she is married—really married—and gone!"

It had passed with the rapidity of a dream: the hurry of joy, the congratulations—all, all was over; and in sad silence, Rosamond felt the reality of her loss—by Rosamond doubly felt at this moment, when all her own affairs were in great uncertainty. Mr Temple was still unable to obtain the performance of the promise which had been made him of *remuneration* and *competent provision*. He had gone through, in compliance with the advice of his friends, the mortification of reiterating vain memorials and applications to the Duke of Greenwich, Lord Skrimpshire, Lord Skreene, and Mr Secretary Cope. The only thing

which Mr Temple refused to do was to implicate Lord Oldborough, or to disturb him on the subject. He had spent some weeks with his old master in his retirement without once adverting to his own difficulties, still hoping that on his return to town a promise would be fulfilled, which Lord Skreene had given him, that "the affair should in his absence be settled to his satisfaction." But on his return to town, his lordship found means of evasion and delay, and threw the blame on others; the course of memorials and representations was to be recommenced. Mr Temple's pride revolted, his love was in despair—and frequently, in the bitterness of disappointment, he reiterated to his friend Alfred his exclamations of regret and self-reproach, for having quitted, from pique and impatience of spirit, a profession where his own perseverance and exertions would infallibly have rendered him by this time independent. Rosamond saw with sympathy and anguish the effect which these feelings of self-reproach, and hope delayed, produced on Mr Temple's spirits and health. His sensibility, naturally quick, and rendered more acute by disappointment, seemed now continually to draw from all characters and events, and even from every book he opened, a moral against himself, some new illustration or example, which convinced him more and more of the folly of being a dependent on the great. He was just in this repentant mood, when one morning, at Mrs Alfred Percy's, Rosamond heard him sigh deeply several times, as he was reading with great attention. She could not forbear asking what it was that touched him so much. He put the book into her hands, pointing to the following passage. "The whole of this letter,"* said he, "is applicable to me and excellent; but this

* Letter from Mr Williams (secretary to Lord Chancellor West) to Mrs Williams.

really seems as if it had been written for me or by me."

She read:—

"I was a young man, and did not think that men were to die, or to be turned out * * * * * * What was to be done now?—No money, my former patron in disgrace! friends that were in favour not able to serve me, or not willing; that is, cold, timid, careful of themselves, and indifferent to a man whose disappointments made him less agreeable * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * I languished on for three long melancholy years, sometimes a little elated; a smile, a kind hint, a downright promise, dealt out to me from those in whom I had placed some silly hopes, now and then brought a little refreshment, but that never lasted long; and to say nothing of the agony of being reduced to talk of one's own misfortunes and one's wants, and that basest and lowest of all conditions, the slavery of borrowing, to support an idle useless being—my time, for those three years, was unhappy beyond description. What would I have given then for a profession! * * * * * * * * * any useful profession is infinitely better than a thousand patrons."

To this Rosamond entirely acceded, and admired the strong good sense of the whole letter; but she observed to Mr Temple, that it was very unjust, not only to himself, but what was of much more consequence, to *her*, to say that all this applied exactly to his case. "Did Mr Temple," she asked, "mean to assert that she could esteem a man who was *an idle useless being*, a mere dependant on great men, a follower of courts? Could such a man have recommended himself to her father?—Could such a man ever have been the chosen friend of her brother Alfred?

"It was true," she acknowledged, "that this friend

of her brother had made one mistake in early life; but who is there that can say that he has not in youth or age committed a single error? Mr Temple had done one silly thing, to be sure, in quarrelling with his profession; but he had suffered, and had made amends for this afterwards, by persevering application to literature. There he had obtained the success he deserved. Gentlemen might sigh and shake their heads, but could any gentleman deny this? Could it be denied that Mr Temple had distinguished himself in literature? Could any person deny that a political pamphlet of his recommended him to the notice of Lord Oldborough, one of the ablest statesmen in England, who made him his secretary, and whose esteem and confidence he afterwards acquired by his merit, and continued, in place and out, to enjoy?—Will any gentleman deny this?" Rosamond added, that, "in defence of *her brother's friend*, she could not help observing, that a man who had obtained the esteem of some of the first persons of their day, who had filled an employment of trust, that of secretary to a minister, with fidelity and credit, who had published three celebrated political pamphlets, and two volumes of moral and philosophical disquisitions, which, as she had heard the bookseller say, were become *stock books*, could not deserve to be called an *idle useless being*. To be born and die would not make all his history—no, such a man would at least be secure of honourable mention in the Biographia Britannica as a writer—moral—political—metaphysical."

But while Rosamond thus did her utmost to support the spirits of her lover, her own began to fail; her vivacity was no longer natural: she felt every day more and more the want of her sister's sympathy and strength of mind.

Letters from abroad gave no hope of Caroline's

return—delay after delay occurred. No sooner had quiet been restored to the country than Count Altenberg's father was taken ill, and his illness, after long uncertainty, terminated fatally.

After the death of his father, the count was involved in a variety of domestic business, which respect for the memory of his parent and affection for surviving relations could not allow him to leave. When all this had been arranged, and when all seemed preparing for their return to England, just when Rosamond hoped that the very next letter would announce the day when they would set out, the French declared war, the French troops were actually in motion—invasion was hourly expected—it was necessary to prepare for the defence of the country. At such a moment the count could not quit his country or his prince. And there was Caroline, in the midst of a country torn by civil war, and in the midst of all the horrors of revolution.

About this time, to increase the anxiety of the Percy family, they learned that Godfrey was taken prisoner on his way home from the West Indies. The transport in which his division of the regiment had embarked had been separated from her convoy by a gale of wind in the night, and it was apprehended that she had been taken by the enemy. Godfrey's family hoped for a moment that this might be a false alarm; but after enduring the misery of reading contradictory paragraphs and contests of the newspaper writers with each other for several successive days, it was at last too clearly established and confirmed, by official intelligence, that the transport was taken by a Dutch ship.

In the midst of these accumulating causes of anxiety, trials of another kind were preparing for this family, as if Fortune was determined to do her utmost to ruin and humble those who had despised her worshippers,

struggled against her influence, and risen in the world in defiance of her power. To explain the danger which now awaited them, we return to their old family enemy, Sir Robert Percy. Master of Percy Hall, and of all that wealth could give, he could not enjoy his prosperity, but was continually brooding on plans of avarice and malice.

Since his marriage with Miss Falconer, Sir Robert Percy's establishment had become so expensive as to fret his temper continually. His tenants had had more and more reason to complain of their landlord, who, when any of his farms were out of lease, raised his rents exorbitantly, to make himself amends, as he said, for the extravagance of his wife. The tenants, who had ever disliked him as the successor and enemy of their *own* good and beloved landlord, now could not and attempted not to conceal their aversion. This renewed and increased the virulence of his dislike to *our* branch of the Percys, who, as he knew, were always compared *with him and his*, and seemed to be for ever present to the provoking memories of these tenants.

Sir Robert was disappointed hitherto in the hope for which he married, the hope of an heir, who should prevent the estate from returning to those from whom it had been wrested by his arts. Envy at seeing the rising and prosperous state of *those Percys*, who, in spite of their loss of fortune, had made their way up again through all obstacles, combined to increase his antipathy to his relations. His envy had been exasperated by the marriage of Caroline to Count Altenberg, and by the high reputation of her brothers. He heard their praises till his soul sickened; and he was determined to be their destruction. He found a willing and able assistant in Sharpe the attorney, and they soon devised a plan worthy of their conjoined

malice. At the time when Sir Robert had come into possession of Percy Hall, after the suit had been decided in his favour, he had given up all claim to the rents which Mr Percy had received during the years which he had held the estate, and had accepted, in lieu of them, the improvements which Mr Percy had made on the estate, and a considerable quantity of family plate and a collection of pictures. But now Sir Robert wrote to Mr Percy without adverting to this agreement, and demanding from him the amount of all the rents which he had received, deducting only a certain sum on his own valuation for improvements. The plate and pictures, which he had left at Percy Hall, Sir Robert said he was willing to take in lieu of the debt; but an immense balance against Mr Percy remained. In technical phrase, we believe, he warned Mr Percy that Sharpe his attorney had directions to commence a suit against him for the *mesne rents*. The amount of the claim was such as it was absolutely impossible that Mr Percy could pay, even by the sale of everything he possessed in the world. If this claim were established, his family would be reduced to beggary, he must end his days in a prison, or fly his country, and take refuge in some foreign land. To this last extremity Sir Robert hoped to reduce him. In reply, however, to his insolent letter, he was surprised by receiving from Mr Percy a calm and short reply, simply saying that his son Alfred would take the proper steps to bring the affair to trial, and that he must submit to the decision of the law, whatever that might be. Sir Robert was mortified to the quick by finding that he could not extort from his victim one concession or complaint, nor one intemperate expression.

But however calm and dignified was Mr Percy's conduct, it could not be without the greatest anxiety

that he awaited the event of the trial, which was to decide his future fate, and that of his whole family.

The length of time which must elapse before the trial could come on was dreadful. Suspense was the evil they found most difficult to endure. Suspense may be easily borne by persons of an indolent character, who never expect to rule their destiny by their own genius; but to those who feel themselves possessed of energy and abilities to surmount obstacles and to brave dangers, it is torture to remain passive—to feel that prudence, virtue, genius, avail them not—that while rapid ideas pass in their imagination, time moves with an unaltered pace, and compels them to wait, along with the herd of vulgar mortals, for knowledge of futurity.

Chapter xli.

WHAT has become all this time of the Falconer family?

Since the marriage of Miss Falconer with Sir Robert Percy, all intercourse between the Falconers and our branch of the Percy family had ceased; but one morning, when Alfred was alone, intently considering his father's case, and the legal difficulties which threatened him, he was surprised by a visit from commissioner Falconer. The commissioner looked thin, pale, and wretched. He began by condoling with Alfred on their mutual family misfortunes. Alfred received this condolence with politeness, but with a proud consciousness that, notwithstanding his father's present difficulties and the total loss of fortune with which he was threatened, neither his father nor any individual in his family would change places with any one of the Falconers; since nothing dishonourable

could be imputed to Mr Percy, and since none of his misfortunes had been occasioned by any imprudence of his own.

A deep sigh from the commissioner, at the moment these thoughts were passing in Alfred's mind, excited his compassion, for he perceived that the same reflections had occurred to him.

After taking an immoderate quantity of snuff, the commissioner went on, and disclaimed in strong terms all knowledge of his son-in-law Sir Robert's cruel conduct to his cousin. The commissioner said that Sir Robert Percy had, since his marriage with Bell Falconer, behaved very ill, and had made his wife show great ingratitude to her own family—that in Mrs Falconer's distress, when she and Georgiana were most anxious to retire from town for a short time, and when Mrs Falconer had naturally looked to the house of her married daughter as a sure asylum, the doors of Percy Hall had been actually shut against her, Sir Robert declaring that he would not be involved in the difficulties and disgrace of a family who had taken him in to marry a girl without any fortune.

Alfred was perfectly convinced, both from the cordial hatred with which the commissioner now spoke of his son-in-law, and from Mr Falconer's disposition, that he had nothing to do with the cruel measures which Sir Robert had taken against his father. Commissioner Falconer was not a malevolent, but a weak man—incapable of being a disinterested friend—equally incapable of becoming a malicious enemy. The commissioner now proceeded to his own affairs, and to the business of his visit. He said that he had been disappointed in all his hopes from the Greenwich party, that when *that sad business of Mrs Falconer's came out*, they had seized this as a pretence for *dropping* him altogether—that when they had, by Lord Oldborough's

retreat from office, obtained everything they wanted, and had no more occasion for assistance or information, they had shamefully forgotten or disowned all their former promises to Cunningham. They had refused to accredit him at the court of Denmark, refused even to defray the expences of his journey thither, which, in the style he had thought it necessary for an ambassador to travel in, had been considerable. Upon the hopes held out, he had taken a splendid house in Copenhagen, and had every day, for some weeks, been in expectation of the arrival of his credentials. When it was publicly known that another ambassador was appointed, Cunningham's creditors became clamorous; he contrived to escape from Copenhagen in the night, and was proceeding *incog.* in his journey homewards, when he was stopped at one of the small frontier towns, and was there actually detained in prison for his debts.

The poor commissioner produced his son's letter, giving an account of his detention, and stating that, unless the money he had raised in Copenhagen was paid, there was no hope of his being liberated—he must perish in a foreign jail.

We spare the reader the just reproaches which the unhappy father, at this moment, uttered against the son's duplicity. It was his fate, he said, to be ruined by those for whom he had been labouring and planning, night and day, for so many years. "And now," concluded Mr Falconer, "here am I, reduced to sell almost the last acre of my paternal estate—I shall literally have nothing left but Falconer Court, and my annuity!—Nothing!——But it must be done, ill as he has used me, and impossible as it is, ever, even at this crisis, to get the truth from him—I must pay the money: he is in jail, and cannot be liberated without this sum. I have here, you see, under the hand of the

chief magistrate, sufficient proof——I will not, however, trouble you, my dear sir, with showing more of these letters—only it is a comfort to me to speak to one who will listen with some sympathy—Ah! sir, when out of place!—out of favour!—selling one's estate!—how people change!—But I am taking up your time. Since these lands are to be sold, the sooner the better. Your father, you know, is trustee to my marriage-settlements, and, I believe, his consent, his signature, will be necessary—will it not?——I am no lawyer—I really am not clear what *is* necessary—and my solicitor, Mr Sharpe, I have dismissed: perhaps you will allow me to put the business into your hands?"

Alfred undertook it, and kindly told the commissioner that if he would send him his papers, he would, without putting him to any expence, look them over carefully—have all the necessary releases drawn—and make his title clear to any purchaser who should apply.

The commissioner was full of gratitude for this friendly offer, and immediately begged that he might leave his title-deeds. Accordingly the servant was desired to bring in the box which he had left in the carriage. The commissioner then rose to take leave, but Alfred begged he would stay till he had written a list of the deeds, as he made it a rule never to take charge of any papers, without giving a receipt for them. The commissioner thought this "a superfluous delicacy between friends and relatives;" but Alfred observed that relations would, perhaps, oftener continue friends, if in matters of business they took care always to be as exact as if they were strangers.

The commissioner looked at his watch—said he was in haste—he was going to wait upon Lord somebody, from whom, in spite of all his experience, he expected something.

"You will find a list of the deeds, I have a notion,"

said he, "in the box, Mr Alfred Percy, and you need only sign it—that will be quite sufficient."

"When I have compared the papers with the list, I will sign it," said Alfred: "my clerk and I will do it as quickly as possible. Believe me, you cannot be in greater haste than I am."

The commissioner, secretly cursing Alfred's accuracy, and muttering something of the necessity for his own punctuality, was obliged to submit. He sat down—the clerk was sent for—the box was opened. The list of the papers was, as Alfred found, drawn out by Buckhurst Falconer; and the commissioner now recollected the time. "Just when poor Buckhurst," said the father, with a sigh, "was arguing with me against going into the Church—at that time, I remember, he was desperately in love with your sister Caroline."

"Why, in truth," said Alfred, smiling, as he read over the scrawled list, "this looks a little as if it were written by a man in love—here's another reason for our comparing the papers and the list."

"Well, well, I took it all upon trust—I am no lawyer—I never looked at them—never opened the box, and am very sorry to be obliged to do it now."

The essential care, either of papers or estate, the commissioner had evermore neglected, while he had all his life been castle-building, or pursuing some phantom of fortune at court. Whilst Alfred was comparing the papers and the list, the commissioner went on talking of the marriage of Caroline with Count Altenberg, asking when they expected them to return. It was possible that Count Altenberg might be moved to make some remonstrance in favour of Cunningham; and a word or two from him to the Duke of Greenwich would do the business. The commissioner longed to hint this to Alfred, but

he was so intent upon these bundles of parchment, that till every one of them was counted, it would be in vain to make that attempt: so the commissioner impatiently stood by, while the clerk went on calling over the papers, and Alfred, in equal strains, replying.

"Thank heaven!" said he to himself, "they have got to the last bundle."

"Bundle eighteen," cried the clerk.

"Bundle eighteen," replied Alfred. "How many numbers does it contain?"

"Six," said the clerk.

"Six!—no, seven, if you please," said Alfred.

"But six in the list, sir."

"I will read them over," said Alfred. "No. 1. Deed of assignment to Filmer Griffin, Esq. No. 2. Deed of mortgage to Margaret Simpson, widow. No. 3. Deed of lease and release. No. 4. Lease for a year——"

"No. 4. no such thing—stop, sir—Deed!"

Alfred gave one look at the paper, and starting up, snatched it from the hands of his clerk, with an exclamation of joy, signed the receipt for the commissioner, put it into his hands, locked the box, and sat down to write a letter, all with such rapidity that the commissioner was struck with astonishment and curiosity. Notwithstanding all his impatience to be punctual to his own engagement, he now stood fixed to the spot, and at last began with "My dear Mr Alfred Percy, may I ask what has happened?"

"My dear commissioner, I have found it—I have found it—the long-lost deed, and I am writing to my father, to tell him. Excuse me—excuse me if I am not able to explain farther at this moment."

The commissioner understood it all too quickly. He saw how it had happened through Buckhurst's carelessness. At the time Buckhurst had been pack-

ing up these papers, some of Mr Percy's had been lying on the table—Buckhurst had been charged not to mix them with his father's; but he was in love, and did not know what he was doing.

The commissioner began three sentences, and left them all unfinished, while Alfred did not hear one word of them: the first was an apology for Buckhurst, the second a congratulation for his good cousin Percy, the third was an exclamation that came from his heart. "Good heavens! but what will become of my daughter Bell and Sir Robert? I do not comprehend quite, my dear sir."

Perceiving that he was not heard by Alfred, the commissioner took up his hat and departed, determining that he would inquire farther from Sir Robert's solicitor concerning the probable consequences of the recovery of this deed.

Alfred had no sooner finished his joyful letter to his father than he wrote to Sir Robert Percy, informing him of the recovery of the deed, and letting him know that he was ready to show it to whoever Sir Robert would send to his house to examine it. He made this offer to put an end at once to all doubts. He trusted, he said, that when Sir Robert should be satisfied of the existence and identity of the deed, he would stop his present proceedings for the recovery of the *mesne rents*, and that he would, without obliging his father to have farther recourse to law, restore to him the Percy estate.

To this letter no answer was received for some time. At length Mr Sharpe called on Alfred, and begged to see the deed. He was permitted to examine it in Alfred's presence. He noted down the date, names of the witnesses, and some other particulars, of which, he observed, it was necessary he should inform Sir Robert, before he could be satisfied as to the identity

of the conveyance. Sharpe was particularly close and guarded in his looks and words during this interview; would neither admit nor deny that he was satisfied, and went away leaving nothing certain, but that he would write to Sir Robert. Alfred thought he saw that they meant to avoid giving an answer, in order to keep possession some months longer, till another term. He took all the necessary steps to bring the matter to trial immediately, without waiting for any answer from Sir Robert. No letter came from him, but Alfred received from his solicitor the following note:—

"SIR,

"I am directed by Sir Robert Percy to acquaint you, in reply to yours of the 20th instant, that conceiving his title to the Percy estate to be in no way affected by the instrument to which you allude therein, he cannot withdraw his present suit for the *mesne rents* that had been already received, if you proceed in an ejectment for the recovery of the aforesaid estate.

"I am, sir,

"Your humble servant,

"A. SHARPE.

"*Wednesday.*"

Alfred was surprised and alarmed by this letter. It had never occurred to him as possible that Sir Robert and his counsel would attempt to stand a new trial in the face of this recovered deed: this was beyond all he could have conceived even from their effrontery and villany. He consulted Mr Friend, who, after considering Sharpe's letter, could not devise what defence they intended to make, as the deed, upon most accurate examination, appeared duly executed, according to the provision of the Statute of Frauds. Upon the whole, Mr Friend was of opinion

that the letter was meant merely to alarm the plaintiffs, and to bring them to offer or consent to a compromise. In this opinion Alfred was confirmed the next day, by an interview with Sharpe, accidental on Alfred's part, but designed and prepared by the solicitor, who watched Alfred as he was coming out of the courts, and dogged him till he parted from some gentlemen with whom he was walking—then joining him, he said, in a voice which Mr Allscrip might have envied for its power of setting sense at defiance, "I am happy, Mr Alfred Percy, to chance to see you to-day; for, with a view to put an end to litigation and difficulties, I had a few words to suggest—premising that I do not act or speak now, in any wise, as or for Sir Robert Percy, or with reference to his being my client, nor as a solicitor in this cause, be it understood, but merely and solely as one gentleman to another, upon honour—and not bringing forward any idea to be taken advantage of hereafter, as tending to anything in the shape of an offer to compromise, which, in a legal point of view, you know, sir, I could not be warranted to hazard for my client, and of consequence, which I hereby declare, I do not in any degree mean."

"Would you be so good, Mr Sharpe, to state at once what you do mean; for I confess I do not, in any degree, understand you."

"Why, then, sir, what I mean is, simply, and candidly, and frankly, this: that if I could, without compromising the interest of my client, which, as an honest man, I am bound not to do or appear to do, I should wish to put an end to this litigation between relations; and though your father thinks me his enemy, would convince him to the contrary, if he would allow me, and could point out the means of shortening this difference between relations, which has occasioned so much scandal; and moreover, could devise an accom-

modation, which might be agreeable to both parties, and save you a vast deal of trouble and vexation; possession," added he, laughing, "being nine parts of the law."

Mr Sharpe paused, as if hoping that something would now be said by Alfred, that might direct him whether to advance or recede; but Alfred only observed, that the end Mr Sharpe proposed to himself by speaking was to be understood, and that this desirable end he had not yet attained.

"Why, sir, in some cases, one cannot venture to make one's self understood any way but by inuendoes."

"Then, good morning to you, sir—you and I can never understand one another.

"Pardon me, sir, unless you are in a hurry," cried Mr Sharpe, catching Alfred by the button, "which (when so large an estate, to which you might eventually succeed, is in question) you are too much a man of business to be—in one word, then, for I won't detain you another moment, and I throw myself open, and trust to your honour——"

"You do me honour."

"Put a parallel case. You, plaintiff A——, I, defendant B——. I should, if I were A——, but no way advising it, being B——, offer to divide the whole property, the claim for the *mesne rents* being wholly given up; and that the offer would be accepted, I'd engage upon my honour, supposing myself witnessing the transaction, only just as a gentleman."

"Impossible, sir," cried Alfred, with indignation. "Do you take me for a fool? Do you think I would give up half my father's estate, knowing that he has a right to the whole?"

"Pardon me, sir—I only suggested an A. B. case. But one word more, sir," cried Mr Sharpe, holding Alfred, who was breaking from him, "for your own

—your father's interest: you see this thing quite in a wrong point of view, when you talk of a few months' more or less delay of getting possession, being all there is between us—depend upon it, if it goes to trial, you will never get possession."

"Then, sir, if you think so, you are betraying the interest of your client, in advising me not to let it go to trial."

"Good God! sir; but that is between you and me only."

"Pardon me, sir, it is between you and your conscience."

"Oh! if that's all—my conscience is at ease, when I'm trying to prevent the scandal of litigation between relations: therefore, just let me mention to you for your private information, what I know Sir Robert would not wish to come out before the trial."

"Don't tell it to me, sir—I will not hear it," cried Alfred, breaking from him, and walking on very fast.

Faster still Sharpe pursued. "You'll remember, sir, at all events, that what has been said is not to go farther—you'll not forget."

"I shall never forget that I am a man of honour, sir," said Alfred.

Sharpe parted from him, muttering, "that if he lived to the day of trial, he would repent this."

"And if I live till the day of judgment, I shall never repent it," thought Alfred.

Now fully convinced that Sir Robert desired a compromise, and wanted only to secure, while in possession, some portion of that property which he knew the law would ultimately force him to relinquish, Alfred persevered in his course, relieved from the alarm into which he had at first been thrown when he learned that his opponents intended to take defence. Alfred felt assured that they would never let the

matter come to trial; but time passed on, and they still persisted. Many of his brother lawyers were not only doubtful, but more inclined to despond than to encourage him as to the event of the trial; several regretted that he had not accepted of Mr Sharpe's offered compromise. "Half the estate certain, and his father's release from all difficulties, they thought too good offers to have been rejected. He might, as Sharpe had prophesied, have to repent his rejection of that proposal."

Others observed, that though Mr Alfred Percy was certainly a young man of great talents, and had been successful at the bar, still he was a young lawyer; and it was a bold and hazardous, not to say rash thing, to take upon himself the conduct of a suit against such opponents as Mr Sharpe and Sir Robert Percy, practised in law, hardened in iniquity, and now driven to desperation.

Mr Friend was the only man who stood steadily by Alfred, and never wavered in his opinion. "Trust to truth and justice," said he; "you did right not to compromise—be firm. If you fail, you will have this consolation—you will have done all that man could do to deserve success."

The day of trial approached. Mr Friend had hoped, till very late in the business, that the object of their adversaries was only to intimidate, and that they would never let it go to trial: now it was plain they would. But on what grounds? Again and again Mr Friend and Alfred perused and reperused Sir John Percy's deed, and examined the opinions of counsel of the first eminence. Both law and right appeared to be clearly on their side; but it was not likely that their experienced opponents should persist without having some strong resource.

A dread silence was preserved by Sir Robert Percy

and by Mr Solicitor Sharpe. They must have some deep design: what it could be, remained to be discovered even till the day of trial.

Chapter xlij.

THE day of trial arrived—Mr Percy came up to town, and brought Mrs Percy and Rosamond with him to his son Alfred's, that they might all be together, and hear as soon as possible their fate.

The trial came on about three o'clock in the afternoon. The court was uncommonly crowded. Mr Percy, his son Erasmus, and all his friends, and Sir Robert and his adherents, appeared on opposite sides of the galleries.

The excellent countenance and gentlemanlike demeanour of Mr Percy were contrasted with the dark, inauspicious physiognomy of Sir Robert, who sat opposite to him, and who was never tranquil one second, but was continually throwing notes to his counsel, beckoning or whispering to his attorney—while convulsive twitches of face and head, snuff-taking, and handkerchief spread frequently to conceal the expression of his countenance, betrayed the malignant flurry of his spirits.

Alfred conducted his father's cause in the most judicious and temperate manner. An attempt had been made by Sir Robert to prejudice the public against Mr Percy by representing him as the descendant of a younger brother, who was endeavouring to dispossess the heir of the elder branch of the family of that estate which belonged to him by right of inheritance. Alfred's first care was to put the court and the jury in full possession of the facts. He stated that "his father, Lewis

Percy, plaintiff in this cause, and Robert Percy, Bart., defendant, both descended from Sir John Percy, who was their grandfather. Sir John outlived both his sons, who left him two grandsons. Robert was the son of his eldest, and Lewis of his youngest son. Sir John had two estates, one of them paternal, which went in the ordinary course of descent to the representative of the eldest son, being the present Sir Robert Percy. Sir John's other estate, in Hampshire, which came to him by his wife, he conveyed, a short time before his death, to his youngest grandson, the present Lewis Percy, who had held undisturbed possession of it for many years. But, in process of time, Sir Robert Percy ruined himself by play, and having frequent intercourse with Sharpe, the solicitor, upon some great emergency inquired whether it was not possible to shake the title of his cousin Mr Percy's estate. He suggested that the conveyance might not be forthcoming; but Sir Robert assured him that both his grandfather and the present Mr Percy were men of business, and that there was little likelihood either that the deeds should be lost, or that there should be any flaw in the title. Afterwards a fire broke out at Percy Hall, which consumed that wing of the house in which were Mr Percy's papers—the papers were all saved except this deed of conveyance. Mr Sharpe being accidentally apprized of the loss, conveyed the intelligence to Sir Robert. He immediately commenced a suit against his cousin, and had finally succeeded in obtaining a verdict in his own favour, and possession of the Hampshire estate. At the time when Mr Percy delivered up possession and quitted Percy Hall, in consideration of the extensive improvements which he had made, and in consideration of his giving up to Sir Robert plate, furniture, wine, horses, and equipages, Sir Robert had promised to forego whatever claim he might have upon Mr Percy

for the rents which he had received during the time he had held the estate; but, afterwards, Sir Robert repented of having made this agreement, broke his promise, and took out a writ against his cousin for the *mesne rents*. They amounted to an immense sum, which Mr Percy was utterly unable to pay, and he could have had no hope of avoiding ruin had the claim been by law decided against him. By fortunate circumstances, however, he had, while this cause was pending, recovered that lost conveyance, which proved his right to the Hampshire estate. Of this he had apprized Sir Robert, who had persisted, nevertheless, in holding possession, and in his claim for the *mesne rents*. The present action was brought by Mr Percy in resistance of this unjust claim, and for the recovery of his property."

Not one word of invective, of eloquence, of ornament, or of any attempt at pathos, did our barrister mix with this statement. It was his object to put the jury and the court clearly in possession of facts, which, unadorned, he knew would appear stronger than if encumbered by any flowers of oratory.

Having produced the deed, conveying the Hampshire estate to his father, Alfred called evidence to prove the signature of Sir John Percy and the handwriting of the witnesses. He farther proved that this conveyance had been formerly seen among his father's papers at Percy Hall, showed it had been recently recovered from Mr Falconer's box of papers, and explained how it had been put there by mistake, and he supported this fact by the evidence of commissioner Falconer, father-in-law to the defendant.—Alfred rested his cause on these proofs, and waited, anxious to know what defence the defendant was prepared to make.

To his astonishment and consternation, Sir Robert's counsel produced another deed of Sir John Percy's,

revoking the deed by which Sir John had made over his Hampshire estate to his younger grandson, Mr Percy; it appearing by a clause in the original deed that a power for this purpose had been therein reserved. This deed of revocation was handed to the judge and to the jury, that it might be examined. The two deeds were carefully compared. The nicest inspection could not discover any difference in the signature or seal. When Mr Friend examined them, he was in dismay. The instrument appeared perfect. Whilst the jury were occupied in this examination, Mr Friend and Alfred had a moment to consult together.

"We are undone," whispered Mr Friend, "if they establish this deed of revocation—it sets us aside for ever."

Neither Mr Friend nor Alfred had any doubt of its being a forgery, but those who had plunged thus desperately in guilt would probably be provided with perjury sufficient to support their iniquity.

"If we had been prepared!" said Mr Friend: "but how could we be prepared for such a stroke? Even now, if we had time, we could summon witnesses who would discredit theirs, but——"

"Do not despair," said Alfred: "still we have a chance that their own witnesses may cross each other, or contradict themselves. Falsehood, with all its caution, is seldom consistent."

The trial proceeded. Alfred, in the midst of the fears and sighs of his friends, and of the triumphant smiles and anticipating congratulations of his enemies, continued to keep both his temper and his understanding cool. His attention was fixed upon the evidence produced, regardless of the various suggestions whispered or written to him by ignorant or learned advisers.

William Clerke, the only surviving witness to the deed of revocation produced by Sir Robert, was the

person on whose evidence the cause principally rested. He was now summoned to appear, and room was made for him. He was upwards of eighty years of age: he came slowly into court, and stood supporting himself upon his staff, his head covered with thin gray hairs, his countenance placid and smiling, and his whole appearance so respectable, so venerable, as to prepossess immediately the jury and the court in his favour.

Alfred Percy could scarcely believe it possible that such a man as this could be the person suborned to support a forgery. After being sworn, he was desired to sit down, which he did, bowing respectfully to the court. Sir Robert Percy's counsel proceeded to examine him as to the points they desired to establish.

"Your name, sir, is William Clerke, is it not?"

"My name is William Clerke," answered the old man, in a feeble voice.

"Did you ever see this paper before?" showing him the deed.

"I did—I was present when Sir John Percy signed it—he bid me witness it, that is, write my name at the bottom, which I did, and then he said, 'Take notice, William Clerke, this is a deed, revoking the deed by which I made over my Hampshire estate to my youngest grandson, Lewis Percy.'"

The witness was going on, but the counsel interrupted.

"You saw Sir John Percy sign this deed—you are sure of that?"

"I am sure of that."

"Is this Sir John Percy's signature?"

"It is—the very same I saw him write; and here is my own name, that he bid me put just there."

"You can swear that this is your handwriting?"

"I can—I do."

"Do you recollect what time Sir John Percy signed this deed?"

"Yes; about three or four days before his death."

"Very well, that is all we want of you, Mr Clerke."

Alfred Percy desired that Clerke should be detained in court, that he might cross-examine him. The defendants went on, produced their evidence, examined all their witnesses, and established all they desired.

Then it came to Alfred's turn to cross-examine the witnesses that had been produced by his adversary. When William Clerke reappeared, Alfred regarding him steadfastly, the old man's countenance changed a little; but still he looked prepared to stand a cross-examination. In spite of all his efforts, however, he trembled.

"Oh! you are trembling on the brink of the grave!" said Alfred, addressing him in a low, solemn tone: "pause, and reflect, whilst you are allowed a moment's time. A few years must be all you have to spend in this world. A few moments may take you to another, to appear before a higher tribunal—before that Judge, who knows our hearts, who sees into yours at this instant."

The staff in the old man's hand shook violently.

Sir Robert Percy's counsel interrupted—said that the witness should not be intimidated, and appealed to the court. The judge was silent, and Alfred proceeded, "You know that you are upon your oath—these are possibly the last words you may ever utter—look that they be true. You know that men have been struck dead whilst uttering falsehoods. You are upon your oath—did you see Sir John Percy sign this deed?"

The old man attempted in vain to articulate.

"Give him time to recollect," cried the counsel on the opposite side: "give him leave to see the writing now he has his spectacles."

He looked at the writing twice—his head and hands

shaking so that he could not fix his spectacles. The question was repeated by the judge. The old man grew pale as death. Sir Robert Percy, just opposite to him, cleared his throat to catch the witness's attention, then darted at him such a look as only he could give.

"Did I see Sir John Percy sign this deed?" repeated William Clerke: "yes, I did."

"You hear, my lord, you hear," cried Sir Robert's counsel, "the witness says he did—there is no occasion farther to intimidate this poor old man. He is not used to speak before such an audience. There is no need of eloquence—all we want is truth. The evidence is positive. My lord, with your lordship's leave, I fancy we may dismiss him."

They were going to hurry him away, but Alfred Percy said that, with the permission of the court, he must cross-examine that witness farther, as the whole event of the trial depended upon the degree of credit that might be given to his evidence.

By this time the old man had somewhat recovered himself; he saw that his age and reverend appearance still prepossessed the jury in his favour, and from their looks, and from the whispers near him, he learned that his tremor and hesitation had not created any suspicion of guilt, but had been attributed rather to the sensibility of virtue and the weakness of age. And, now that the momentary emotion which eloquence had produced on his mind had subsided, he recollected the bribe that had been promised to him. He was aware that he had already sworn what, if he contradicted, might subject him to be prosecuted for perjury. He now stood obstinately resolved to persevere in his iniquity. The first falsehoods pronounced and believed, the next would be easy.

"Your name is William Clerke, and this," said

Alfred (pointing to the witness's signature), "is your handwriting?"

"Yes, I say it is."

"You *can* write then?" (putting a pen into his hand): "be so good as to write a few words in the presence of the court." He took the pen, but after making some fruitless attempts, replied, "I am too old to write—I have not been able to write my name these many years—Indeed! sir, indeed! you are too hard upon one like me. God knows," said he, looking up to heaven, some thought with feeling, some suspected with hypocrisy—"God knows, sir, I speak the truth, and nothing but the truth. Have you any more questions to put to me? I am ready to tell all I know. What interest have I to conceal anything?" continued he, his voice gaining strength and confidence as he went on repeating the lesson which he had been taught.

"It was long, a long while ago," he said, "since it had all happened; but thank Heaven, his memory had been spared him, and he remembered all that had passed, the same as if it was but yesterday. He recollected how Sir John looked, where he sat, what he said when he signed this deed; and, moreover, he had often before heard of a dislike Sir John had taken to his younger grandson—ay, to that young gentleman's father," looking at Alfred; "and I was very sorry to hear it—very sorry there should be any dispute in the family, for I loved them all," said he, wiping his eyes—"ay, I loved 'em all, and all alike, from the time they were in their cradles. I remember, too, once, Sir John said to me, William Clerke, says he, you are a faithful lad—for I was a lad once——"

Alfred had judiciously allowed the witness to go on as far as he pleased with his story, in the expectation that some exaggeration and contradiction would appear; but the judge now interrupted the old man,

observing that this was nothing to the purpose—that he must not take up the time of the court with idle tales, but that if he had anything more to give in evidence respecting the deed, he should relate it.

The judge was thought to be severe; and the old man, after glancing his eye on the jury, bowed with an air of resignation, and an appearance of difficulty, which excited their compassion.

"We may let him go now, my lord, may not we?" said Sir Robert Percy's counsel.

"With the permission of his lordship, I will ask one other question," said Alfred.

Now it should be observed, that after the first examination of this witness, Alfred had heard him say to Mr Sharpe, "They forgot to bring out what I had to say about the seal." To which Sharpe had replied, "Enough without it."

Alfred had examined the seal, and had observed that there was something underneath it—through a small hole in the parchment he saw something between the parchment and the sealing-wax.

"You were present, I think you say, Mr Clerke, not only when this deed was signed, but when it was sealed?"

"I was, sir," cried Clerke, eager to bring out this part of the evidence, as it had been prepared for him by Sir Robert; "I surely was; and I remember it particularly, because of a little remarkable circumstance: Sir John, God bless him!—I think I see him now ——My lord, under this seal," continued the old man, addressing himself to the judge, and putting his shrivelled finger upon the seal, "under this very seal Sir John put a sixpence—and he called upon me to observe him doing it—for, my lord, it is my opinion, he thought then of what might come to pass—he had a sort of a foreboding of this day. And now, my lord, order

them, if you please, to break the seal—break it before them all—and if there is not the sixpence under it, why this deed is not Sir John's, and this is none of my writing, and," cried he, lifting up his hands and eyes, "I am a liar, and perjured."

There was a profound silence. The seal was broken. The sixpence appeared. It was handed in triumph, by Sir Robert Percy's counsel, to the jury and to the judge. There seemed to be no longer a doubt remaining in the minds of the jury—and a murmur of congratulation among the partisans of Sir Robert seemed to anticipate the verdict.

"'Tis all over, I fear," whispered Friend to Alfred. "Alfred, you have done all that could be done, but they have sworn through everything—it is over with us."

"Not yet," said Alfred. Every eye turned upon him, some from pity, some from curiosity, to see how he bore his defeat. At length, when there was silence, he begged to be permitted to look at the sixpence. The judge ordered that it should be shown to him. He held it to the light to examine the date of the coin; he discovered a faint impression of a head on the sixpence, and, upon closer inspection, he made out the date, and showed clearly that the date of the coin was later than the date of the deed: so that there was an absolute impossibility that this sixpence could have been put under the seal of the deed by Sir John.

The moment Alfred stated this fact, the counsel on the opposite side took the sixpence, examined it, threw down his brief, and left the court. People looked at each other in astonishment. The judge ordered that William Clerke should be detained, that he might be prosecuted by the Crown for perjury.

The old man fell back senseless. Mr Sharpe and Sir Robert Percy pushed their way together out of

court, disclaimed by all who had till now appeared as their friends. No farther evidence was offered, so that here the trial closed. The judge gave a short, impressive charge to the jury, who, without withdrawing, instantly gave their verdict in favour of the plaintiff, Lewis Percy—a verdict that was received with loud acclamations, which not even respect to the court could restrain.

Mr Percy and Alfred hastily shook hands with their friends, and in the midst of universal applause hurried away to carry the good news to Mrs Percy and Rosamond, who were at Alfred's house, waiting to hear the event of the trial.

Neither Alfred nor Mr Percy had occasion to speak—the moment Mrs Percy and Rosamond saw them they knew the event.

"Yes," said Mr Percy, "our fortune is restored; and doubly happy we are, in having regained it, in a great measure, by the presence of mind and ability of my son."

His mother and sister embraced Alfred with tears of delight. For some moments a spectator might have imagined that he beheld a family in deep affliction. But soon through these tears appeared on the countenance of each individual the radiance of joy, smiles of affection, tenderness, gratitude, and every delightful benignant feeling of the human heart.

"Has anybody sent to Mrs Hungerford and to Lady Jane Granville?" said Mr Percy.

"Yes, yes, messengers were sent off the moment the verdict was given," said Erasmus: "I took care of that."

"It is a pity," said Rosamond, "that Caroline is not here at this moment, and Godfrey."

"It is best as it is," said Mrs Percy: "we have that pleasure still in store."

"And now, my beloved children," said Mr Percy, "after having returned thanks to Providence, let me here, in the midst of all of you to whom I owe so large a share of my happiness, sit down quietly for a few minutes to enjoy 'the sober certainty of waking bliss.'"

Chapter xliij.

THE day after the trial brought several happy letters to the Percys. Rosamond called it the day of happy letters, and by that name it was ever after recorded in the family. The first of these letters was from Godfrey, as follows:—

"Dear father, mother, brothers, and sisters all! I hope you are not under any anxiety about me, for here I am, safe and sound, and in excellent quarters, at the house of Mynheers Grinderweld, Groensveld, and Slidderschild, Amsterdam, the Dutch merchants who were shipwrecked on our coast years ago! If it had happened yesterday, the thing could not be fresher in their memories. My dear Rosamond, when we laughed at their strange names, square figures, and formal advice to us, if ever we should, by the changes and chances of human events, be reduced to distress, we little thought that I, a prisoner, should literally come to seek shelter at their door. And most hospitably have I been received. National prejudices, which I early acquired, I don't know how, against the Dutch, made me fancy that a Dutchman could think only of himself, and would give nothing for nothing: I can only say from experience, I have been as hospitably treated in Amsterdam as ever I was in London. These honest merchants have overwhelmed me with civilities and substantial

services, and still they seem to think they can never do enough for me. I wish I may ever see them on English ground again. But we have no Percy Hall to receive them in now; and as well as I remember the Hills, we could not conveniently stow more than one at a time. Side by side, as they stood after breakfast, I recollect, at Percy Hall, they would completely fill up the parlour at the Hills.

"I may well be in high spirits to-day; for these good people have just been telling me that the measures they have been taking to get my exchange effected have so far succeeded, they have reason to believe that in a week, or a fortnight at farthest, I shall be under weigh for England.

"In the meantime, you will wonder perhaps how I got here; for I perceive that I have subjected myself to Rosamond's old reproach of never beginning my story at the beginning. My father used to say, half the mistakes in human affairs arise from our *taking for granted;* but I think I may take it for granted that either from the newspapers or from Gascoigne, who must be in England by this time, you have learned that the transport I was on board, with my division of the regiment, parted convoy in the storm of the 18th, in the night, and at daybreak fell in with two Dutchmen. Our brave boys fought as Englishmen always do; but all that is over now, so it does not signify prosing about it. Two to one was too much—we were captured. I had not been five minutes on the Dutchman's deck, when I observed one of the sailors eyeing me very attentively. Presently he came up and asked if my name was not Percy, and if I did not recollect to have seen him before? He put me in mind of the ship-wreck, and told me he was one of the sailors who were harboured in one of my father's outhouses whilst they were repairing the wreck. I asked him what had

become of the drunken carpenter, and told him the disaster that ensued in consequence of that rascal's carelessness. My sailor was excessively shocked at the account of the fire at Percy Hall: he thumped his breast till I thought he would have broke his breast-bone; and after relieving his mind by cursing and swearing in high Dutch, low Dutch, and English, against the drunken carpenter, he told me there was no use in saying any more, for that he had punished himself.—He was found dead one morning behind a barrel, from which in the night he had been drinking spirits surreptitiously through a straw. Pray tell this to old John, who used always to prophesy that this fellow would come to no good: assure him, however, at the same time, that all the Dutch sailors do not deserve his maledictions. Tell him, I can answer for the poor fellow who recognized me, and who, during the whole passage, never failed to show me and my fellow-prisoners every little attention in his power. When we got to Amsterdam, it was he reminded me of the Dutch merchants, told me their names, which, without his assistance, I might have perished before I could ever have recollected, and showed me the way to their house, and never rested till he saw me well settled.

"You will expect from me some account of this place. You need not expect any, for just as I had got to this line in my letter appeared one who has put all the lions of Amsterdam fairly out of my head—Mr Gresham! He has been for some weeks in the country, and has just returned. The Dutch merchants, not knowing of his being acquainted with my family, never mentioned him to me, nor me to him: so our surprise at meeting was great. What pleasure it is in a foreign country, and to a poor prisoner, to see any one from dear England, and one who knows our own

friends! I had never seen Mr Gresham myself, but you have all by your letters made me well acquainted with him. I like him prodigiously, to use a lady's word (not yours, Rosamond). Letters from Mr Henry were waiting for him here; he has just opened them, and the first news he tells me is, that Caroline is going to be married! Is it possible? Count Altenberg! The last time I heard from you, you mentioned nothing of all this. Some of your letters must have been lost. Pray write again immediately, and do not take it for granted that I shall be at home before a letter reaches me; but give me a full history of everything up to the present moment. Groensveld is sealing his letters for London, and must have mine now or never. Adieu! Pray write fully: you cannot be too minute for a poor prisoner.

"Yours affectionately,
"burning with curiosity,
"GODFREY PERCY."

A letter from Mr Gresham to Mr Henry farther informed them, that Godfrey's exchange was actually effected, and that he had secured his passage on board a vessel just ready to sail for England.

Next came letters from Count Altenberg. Briefly, in the laconic style of a man pressed at once by sudden events and strong feelings, he related that at the siege of the city of ***** by the French, early in the morning of the day on which it was expected that the enemy would attempt to storm the place, his prince, while inspecting the fortifications, was killed by a cannon-ball, on the very spot where the count had been standing but a moment before. All public affairs were changed in his country by the death of the prince. His successor, of a weak character, was willing to purchase present ease, and to secure his low pleasures, at any price—

ready to give up the honour of his country, and submit to the conqueror—that he had been secretly intriguing with the enemy, had been suspected, and this suspicion was confirmed by his dastardly capitulation when the means of defence were in his power and the spirit of his people eager for resistance.

With indignation, heightened by grief, contrast, and despairing patriotism, Count Altenberg had remonstrated in vain—had refused, as minister, to put his signature to the capitulation—had been solicited urgently to concede—offers of wealth and dignities pressed upon him: these he rejected with scorn. Released from all his public engagements by the death of the prince and by the retiring of the princess from court, Count Altenberg refused to act as minister under his successor; and seeing that, under such a successor to the government, no means of serving or saving the country remained, he at once determined to quit it for ever: resolved to live in a free country, already his own, half by birth and wholly by inclination, where he had property sufficient to secure him independence, sufficient for his own wishes, and for those of his beloved Caroline—a country where he could enjoy better than on any other spot in the whole compass of the civilized world, the blessings of real liberty and of domestic tranquillity and happiness.

His decision made, it was promptly executed. He left to a friend the transacting the sale of his German property, and Caroline concluded his letter with

"My dear Friends,

"Passports are obtained, everything ready. Early next week we set out for England; by the first of next month we shall be at HOME."

Then came a letter from Lord Oldborough. Some time previous to the trial, surprised at neither seeing Mr

Temple nor hearing of his marriage, his lordship had written to inquire what delayed his promised return. Taking it for granted that he was married, his lordship in the most polite manner begged that he would prevail upon his bride to enliven the retirement of an old statesman by her sprightly company. As the friend of her father he made this request, with a confidence in her hereditary disposition to show him kindness.

In reply to this letter, Mr Temple told his friend and master what had delayed his marriage, and why he had hitherto forborne to trouble him on the subject. Lord Oldborough, astonished and indignant, uttered once and but once contemptuous exclamations against the "inconceivable meanness of Lord Skrimpshire," and the "infinitely small mind of his grace of Greenwich:" then, without condescending to any communication with inferior powers, his lordship applied directly to the highest authority. The consequence was, that a place double the value of that which had been promised was given to Mr Temple, and it was to announce his appointment to it that occasioned the present letter from Lord Oldborough, enclosing one from Mr Secretary Cope, who "had it in command to assure his lordship that the delay had arisen solely from the anxious desire of his Majesty's ministers to mark their respect for his lordship's recommendation, and their sense of Mr Temple's merit, by doing more than had been originally proposed. An opportunity, for which they had impatiently waited, had now put it into their power to evince the sincerity of their intentions in a mode which they trusted would prove to the entire satisfaction of his lordship."

The greatest care was taken both in substance and manner to gratify Lord Oldborough, whose loss had been felt, and whose value had, upon comparison, increased in estimation.

Rosamond was rewarded by seeing the happiness of the man she loved, and hearing him declare that he owed it to her prudence.

"Rosamond's prudence!—Who ever expected to hear this?" Mr Percy exclaimed. "And yet the praise is just. So henceforward, none need ever despair of grafting prudence upon generosity of disposition and vivacity of temper."

Mr Temple obtained from Rosamond a promise to be his as soon as her sister Caroline and her brother should arrive.

Lady Jane Granville, who felt the warmest interest in their prosperity, was the first to whom they communicated all this joyful intelligence. Her ladyship's horses had indeed reason to rue this day; for they did more work this day than London horses ever accomplished before in the same number of hours, not excepting even those of the merciless Mrs John Prevost; for Lady Jane found it necessary to drive about to her thousand acquaintance to spread the news of the triumph and felicity of the Percy family.

In the midst of this tumult of joy, Mr Percy wrote two letters: one was to his faithful old steward, John Nelson, who deserved from his master this mark of regard; the other was to commissioner Falconer, to make him some friendly offers of assistance in his own affairs, and to beg that, through him, his daughter, the unhappy and deserted lady of Sir Robert Percy, might be assured that neither Mr Percy nor any of his family wished to put her to inconvenience; and that far from being in haste to return to Percy Hall, they particularly wished to wait in town for the arrival of Caroline and Count Altenberg; and they therefore requested that she would not hasten her removal, from any false idea of their impatience. We said the deserted lady of Sir Robert Percy, for Sir Robert had fled from the country.

On quitting the court after the trial, he took all the ready money he had previously collected from his tenants, and set out for the Continent, leaving a note for his wife, apprizing her "that she would never see him more, and that she had better return to her father and mother, as he had no means left to support her extravagance."

Commissioner Falconer was at this time at Falconer Court, where he had been obliged to go to settle some business with his tenantry, previous to the sale of his land for the redemption of Cunningham. The commissioner's answer to Mr Percy's letter was as follows :—

"I cannot tell you, my dear sir, how much I was touched by the kindness of your letter and conduct—so different from what I have met with from others. I will not cloud your happiness—in which, believe me, I heartily rejoice—by the melancholy detail of all my own sorrows and disappointments; but only answer briefly to your friendly inquiries respecting my affairs.

"And first, for my unfortunate married daughter, who has been in this terrible manner returned upon our hands. She thanks you for your indulgence, on which she will not encroach. Before you receive this, she will have left Percy Hall. She is going to live with a Miss Clapham, a great heiress, who wants a fashionable companion and chaperon. Mrs Falconer became acquainted with her at Tunbridge, and has devised this plan for Arabella. I fear Bell's disposition will not suit such a situation, but she has no other resource.

"Mrs Falconer and Georgiana have so *over-managed* matters with respect to Petcalf, that it has ended, as I long since feared it would, in his breaking off. If Mrs Falconer had taken my advice, Georgiana might now be completely settled; instead of which she is fitting out for India. She is going, to be sure, in good com-

pany; but in my opinion the expence (which, Heaven knows, I can ill afford) will be thrown away like all the rest—for Georgiana has been much worn by late hours, and though still young, has, I fear, lost her bloom, and looks rather old for India.

"I am truly obliged to you, my dear sir, for your friendly offer with respect to Falconer Court, and have in consequence stopped the sale of the furniture. I shall rejoice to have such a good tenant as Mr Temple. It is indeed much more agreeable to me to let than to sell. The accommodation, as you propose, will put it in my power to release Cunningham, which is my most pressing difficulty.

"As you are the only person in the world now who takes an interest in my affairs, or to whom I can safely unburden my mind, I must, though I know complaint to be useless, relieve my heart by it for a moment. I can safely say, that for the last ten years of my life I have never spent a day *for myself*. I have been continually planning and toiling to advance my family—not an opportunity has been neglected; and yet from this very family springs all my unhappiness. Even Mrs Falconer blames me as the cause of that *sad business*, which has disgraced us for ever, and deprived us of all our friends—and has afforded an excuse for breaking all promises. There are many, whom I will not name, but they are persons now high in office, who have—I may venture to say it to you—used me shamefully ill.

"Many an honest tradesman and manufacturer, to say nothing of men of talents in the liberal professions, I have seen in the course of the last forty years make their own fortunes, and large fortunes, while I have ended worse than I began—have literally been working all my life for others, not only without reward, but without thanks. If I were to begin life again, I certainly should follow your principles, my dear sir, and depend

more upon myself, and less upon others, than I have done—But now all is over. Let me assure you, that in the midst of my own misfortunes, I rejoice in your prosperity, and in the esteem and respect with which I hear you and yours spoken of by all.

"Present my affectionate regards and congratulations to Mrs Percy and to all your amiable and happy circle. Propriety and feeling for my poor daughter, Lady Percy, must prevent my paying at present my personal congratulations to you at Percy Hall; but I trust you will not the less believe in the sincerity of my attachment.

"I am, my dear sir,
"Your obliged and faithful
"Friend and servant,
"T. Falconer.

"P.S.—I have just learnt that the little place I mentioned to Mr Alfred Percy, when we last met, is not disposed of. Lord Oldborough's influence, as Mr Temple well knows, is still all-powerful; and your interest with his lordship, you must be sensible, is greater than that of any other person living, without exception. A word from you would do the business for me. It is but a trifle, which I should once have been ashamed to ask: but it is now a matter of necessity."

The event of the trial, and the restoration of the Percy family to their property, were heard with transports of joy by the old tenantry. They had not needed the effect of contrast to make them love and feel the value of their good landlord; but certainly Sir Robert Percy's tyranny, and all that he had made them suffer for their obstinate fidelity to the *old branch*, had heightened and fortified their attachment. It was now their turn to glory in that honest obstinacy, and

with the strong English sense of justice, they triumphed in having the rightful owners restored to their estate, and to the seat of their ancestors.

As the Percy family crossed the well-known bridge at the end of the village, those bells, which had sounded so mournfully, which had been muffled when they quitted their home, now rang out a merry triumphant peal—and it was rung by the hands of the very same persons who had formerly given that proof of attachment to him in his adversity.—Emotion as strong now seized Mr Percy's heart. At the same spot he jumped out of the carriage, and by the same path along which he had hastened to stop the bellringers, lest they should ruin themselves with Sir Robert, he now hastened to see and thank these honest, courageous people. In passing through the village, which had been freshly swept and garnished, the people whom he remembered to have seen in tears following the carriage at their departure were now crowding to their doors with faces bright with smiles. Hats that had never stirred, and backs that had never bent for the *usurper*, were now eager with low bows to mark their proud respect to the true man. There were no noisy acclamations, for all were touched. The voices of the young children, however, were heard, who, as their mothers held them up in their arms to see the landlord, of whom they had heard so much, offered their little nosegays as the open carriage passed, and repeated blessings on those on whom from their cradles they had heard blessings bestowed by their parents.

The old steward stood ready at the park-gate to open it for his master. His master and the ladies put their hands out of the carriage to shake hands with him, but he could not stand it. He just touched his master's hand. Tears streamed down his face, and turning away without being able to say one word, he hid himself in the porter's lodge.

As they drove up to the house, they saw standing on the steps waiting—and long had he been waiting there, for the first sound of the carriage—Johnson, the butler, who had followed the family to the Hills, and had served them in their fallen fortunes—Johnson was now himself. Before the hall-door, wide open to receive them, he stood, with the livery-servants in due order.

Mrs Harte, the good old housekeeper, had been sent down to prepare for the reception of the family, and a world of trouble she had had; but all was now right and proper, and she was as active and alert as the youngest of her maidens could have been, in conducting the ladies to their apartments, in showing all the old places, and doing what she called the honours of the *re-installation*. She could have wished to have vented a little of her indignation, and to have told how some things had been left; but her better taste and judgment, and her sense of what would be pleasing to her master and mistress, repressed all recrimination. By the help of frequent recurrence to her snuff-box, in difficulties great, together with much rubbing of her hands, and some bridling of her head, she got through it, without naming those, who should not be thought of, as she observed, on this joyful day.

The happiness of the Percy family was completed by the return of Godfrey, of Caroline, and Count Altenberg. Godfrey arrived just as his family were settled at Percy Hall. After his long absence from his home and country, he doubly enjoyed this scene of domestic prosperity. Beloved as Rosamond was by rich and poor in the neigbourhood, and the general favourite of her family, her approaching marriage spread new and universal joy. It is impossible to give an idea of the congratulations, and of the bustle of the various preparations, which were going on at this time at Percy Hall, especially in the lower regions. Even Mrs Harte's

all-regulating genius was insufficient for the exigencies of the times. Indeed her head and her heart were now at perpetual variance, continually counteracting and contradicting each other. One moment delighted with the joy and affection of the world below, she would come up to boast of it to her mistress and her young ladies; the next moment she would scold all the people for being out of their wits, and for not minding or knowing a single thing they were doing, or ordered to do, "no more than the babes in the wood;" then proving the next minute and acknowledging that she was "*really quite as bad as themselves*. And no wonder, for the thought of Miss Rosamond's marriage had turned her head entirely upside down—for she had been at Miss Rosamond's christening, held her by proxy, and considered her always as her particular own child, and well she might, for a better, except, perhaps, Miss Caroline—I should say *the countess*—never breathed."

The making a *desert* island for Miss Rosamond's wedding-dinner was the object which had taken such forcible possession of Mrs Harte's imagination, that till it was accomplished it was in vain to hope that any other could, in her eyes, appear in any kind of proportion. In the midst of all the sentimental joy above stairs, and in the midst of all the important business of settlements and lawyers, Mrs Harte was pursuing the settled purpose of her soul, constructing with infinite care, as directed by her Complete English Housekeeper, *a desert island for a wedding*, in a deep china dish, with a mount in the middle, two figures upon the mount, with crowns on their heads, a knot of rock-candy at their feet, and gravel-walks of *shot comfits*, judiciously intersecting in every direction their dominions.

Chapter xliv.

AS soon as it was possible, after his return to Percy Hall, Mr Percy went to pay his respects to Lord Oldborough. He found this great statesman happy in retirement, without any affectation of happiness. There were proofs in everything about him that his mind had unbent itself agreeably; his powers had expanded upon different objects, building, planting, improving the soil and the people.

He had many tastes, which had long lain dormant, or rather which had been held in subjugation by one tyrant passion. That passion vanquished, the former tastes resumed their activity. The superior strength of his character was shown in his never recurring to ambition. Its vigour was displayed in the means by which he supplied himself not only with variety of occupation, but with variety of motive. Those who best know the human mind must be aware of the difficulty of supplying motive for one accustomed to stimulus of so high a kind as that to which Lord Oldborough had been habituated. For one who had been at the head of the government of a great nation, to make for himself objects in the stillness and privacy of a country life, required no common talent and energy of soul. The difficulty was increased to Lord Oldborough, for to him the vast resource of a taste for literature was wanting.

The biographer of Sir Robert Walpole tells us, that though he had not forgotten his classical attainments, he had little taste for literary occupations. Sir Robert once expressed his regret on this subject to Mr Fox, in the library at Houghton. "I wish," he said, "I took as much delight in reading as you do; it would be the means of alleviating many tedious hours in my present retirement. But, to my misfortune, I derive no pleasure from such pursuits."

Lord Oldborough felt, but never condescended to complain of that deficiency of, general literature, which was caused in him partly by his not having had time for the attainment, and partly by his having formed too low an estimate of the influence and power of literature in the political world. But he now took peculiar delight in recalling the classical studies in which he had in his youth excelled: as Mr Percy sympathized with him in this taste, there was another point in which they coalesced. Mr Percy staid with his old friend some days, for he was anxious to give him this proof of attachment, and felt interested in seeing his character develop itself in a new direction, displaying fresh life and strength, and unexpected resource in circumstances, in which statesmen of the most vigorous minds, and of the highest spirit, have been seen to "droop and drowse," to sink into indolence, sensuality, or the horrors of hypochondriacism and superstition.

Lord Oldborough, on his first retiring to Clermont Park, had informed Mr Percy that he should wish to see him as soon as he had arranged certain papers. He now reminded his lordship of it, and Lord Oldborough put into his hands a sketch, which he had been drawing out, of the principal transactions in which he had been engaged during his political career, with copies of his letters to the first public characters of the day in our own and in foreign countries. Even by those who had felt no regard for the man, the letters of such a minister would have been read with avidity; but Mr Percy perused them with a stronger interest than any which could be created by mere political or philosophical curiosity. He read them with the pleasure which a generous mind takes in admiring that which is good and great, with the delight which a true friend feels in seeing proofs that justify all the esteem he had previously felt. He saw in these original documents, in this history of

Lord Oldborough's political life, the most perfect consistency and integrity, the most disinterested and enlightened patriotism. When Mr Percy returned the manuscript to his lordship, he spoke of the satisfaction he must experience in looking back upon this record of a life spent in the service of his country, and observed that he was not surprised that, with such a solid source of self-approbation, such indefeasible claims to the gratitude of his countrymen, and such well-earned fame, he should be, as he appeared, happy in retirement.

"I am happy, and, I believe, principally from the cause you have mentioned," said Lord Oldborough, who had a mind too great for the affectation of humility. "So far I am happy."

"Yet," added he, after a considerable pause, "I have, I feel, a greater capability of happiness, for which I have been prevented from making any provision, partly by the course of life of which I made choice, and partly by circumstances over which I had no control."

He paused again; and turning the conversation, spoke of his sister, an elderly lady, who had come to pass some time with him. They had lived separate almost all their lives; she in Scotland with her husband, a Scottish nobleman, who having died about the time when Lord Oldborough had resigned his ministerial situation, she had accepted his lordship's invitation to visit him in his retirement. The early attachment he had had for this sister seemed to revive in his mind when they met; and, as if glad to have some object for his affections, they were poured out upon her. Mr Percy observed a tenderness in his manner and voice when he spoke to her, a thousand little attentions, which no one would have expected from the apparently stern Lord Oldborough, a man who had been engrossed all his life by politics.

On the morning of the last day which Mr Percy

meant to spend at Clermont Park, his lordship, as they were sitting together in his study, expressed more than common regret at the necessity for his friend's departure, but said, "I have no right to detain you from your family." Then, after a pause, he added, "Mr Percy, you first gave me the idea that a private life is the happiest."

"My lord, in most cases I believe it is; but I never meant to assert that a public life spent in noble exertion, and with the consciousness of superior talent and utility, is not more desirable than the life of any obscure individual can possibly be, even though he possess the pleasure of domestic ease and tranquillity. There are men of eminent abilities, capable of extraordinary exertions, inspired by exalted patriotism—I believe, notwithstanding the corruption of so many has weakened all faith in public virtue, I believe in the existence of such men—men who devote themselves to the service of their country: when the time for their relinquishing the toils of public life arrives, honour and self-approbation follow them in retirement."

"It is true, I am happy," repeated Lord Oldborough; "but to go on with what I began to say to you yesterday—I feel that some addition might be made to my happiness. The sense of having, to the best of my ability, done my duty is satisfactory. I do not require applause—I disdain adulation—I have sustained my public life without sympathy—I could seldom meet with it—where I could, I have enjoyed it—and could now enjoy it—exquisitely—as you do, Mr Percy—surrounded by a happy family. Domestic life requires domestic pleasures—objects for the affections."

Mr Percy felt the truth of this, and could answer only by suggesting the idea of Mr Temple, who was firmly and warmly attached to Lord Oldborough, and for whom his lordship had a strong regard.

"Mr Temple, and my daughter Rosamond, whom your lordship honoured with so kind an invitation, propose, I know, paying their respects to you next week. Though I am her father, I may venture to say that Rosamond's sprightliness is so mixed with solid information and good sense that her society will become agreeable to your lordship."

"I shall rejoice to see Mrs Temple here. As the daughter of one friend, and the wife of another, she has a double claim to my regard. And (to say nothing of hereditary genius or dispositions—in which you do not believe, and I do), there can be no doubt that the society of a lady, educated as your daughter has been, must suit my taste. The danger is, that her society should become necessary to me. For Mr Temple I already feel a degree of affection, which I must repress, rather than indulge."

"Repress!—Why so, my lord? You esteem him—you believe in the sincerity of his attachment?"

"I do."

"Then why with stoicism—pardon me, my dear lord—why repress affection?"

"Lest I should become dependent for my daily happiness on one whose happiness is independent of mine—in some degree incompatible with mine. Even if his society were given to me, his heart must be at his home, and with his family. You see I am no proud stoic, but a man who dares to look at life—the decline of life, such as it is—as it must be. Different, Mr Percy, in your situation—and in mine."

The conversation was here interrupted by the arrival of a carriage.

Lord Oldborough looked out of the window as it passed—then smiled, and observed how altered the times were, since Clermont Park used to be crowded with visitors and carriages—now the arrival of one is an event.

The servant announced a foreign name—a Neapolitan abbé, who had come over in the train of a new ambassador: he had just arrived in England, and had letters from the Cardinal * * * *, his uncle, which he was desired to deliver into Lord Oldborough's own hand. The abbé was, it appeared, personally a stranger to him, but there had been some ministerial intercourse between his lordship and the cardinal. Lord Oldborough received these political letters with an air of composure and indifference which proved that he ceased to have an interest in the game.

"He supposed," he said, "that the abbé had been apprized that he was no longer one of his Majesty's ministers—that he had resigned his official situation—had retired—and that he took no part whatever in public affairs.

The abbé replied that he had been apprized that Lord Oldborough had retired from the public office; but his uncle, he added, with a significant smile, was aware that Lord Oldborough's influence was as great still as it had ever been, and greater than that of any ostensible minister.

This Lord Oldborough disclaimed—coolly observing that his influence, whatever it might be, could not be known even to himself, as it was never exerted; and that, as he had determined never more to interfere in public business, he could not be of the least political service to the cardinal. The Duke of Greenwich was now the person to whom on such subjects all applications should be addressed.

The abbé, however, repeated, that his instructions from the cardinal were positive and peremptory to deliver these letters into no hands but those of Lord Oldborough—that in consequence of this strict injunction he had come purposely to present them. He was instructed to request his lordship would not put the

letters into the hands of any secretary, but would have the goodness to examine them himself, and give his counsel how to proceed, and to whom they should, in case of his lordship's declining to interfere, be addressed.

"Mr Percy!" said Lord Oldborough, recalling Mr Percy, who had risen to quit the room, "you will not leave me——Whatever you may wish to say, M. l'Abbé, may be said before this gentleman, my friend."

His lordship then opened the packet, examined the letters—read and redirected some to the Duke of Greenwich, others to the king: the abbé all the time descanting vehemently on Neapolitan politics—regretting Lord Oldborough's resignation—adverting still to his lordship's powerful influence—and pressing some point in negotiation, for which his uncle, the cardinal, was most anxious.

Among the letters, there was one which Lord Oldborough did not open: he laid it on the table with the direction downwards, leaned his elbow upon it, and sat as if calmly listening to the abbé; but Mr Percy, knowing his countenance, saw signs of extraordinary emotion, with difficulty repressed.

At length the gesticulating abbé finished, and waited his lordship's instructions.

They were given in few words. The letters redirected to the king and the Duke of Greenwich were returned to him. He thanked his lordship with many Italian superlatives — declined his lordship's invitation to stay till the next day at Clermont Park—said he was pressed in point of time—that it was indispensably necessary for him to be in London, to deliver these papers as soon as possible. His eye glanced on the unopened letter.

"Private, sir," said Lord Oldborough, in a stern voice, without moving his elbow from the paper:

"whatever answer it may require, I shall have the honour to transmit to you—for the cardinal."

The abbé bowed low, left his address, and took leave. Lord Oldborough, after attending him to the door, and seeing him depart, returned, took out his watch, and said to Mr Percy, "Come to me, in my cabinet, in five minutes."

Seeing his sister on the walk approaching his house, he added, "Let none follow me."

When the five minutes were over, Mr Percy went to Lord Oldborough's cabinet—knocked—no answer—knocked again—louder—all was silent—he entered—and saw Lord Oldborough seated, but in the attitude of one just going to rise; he looked more like a statue than a living person: there was a stiffness in his muscles, and over his face and hands a deathlike colour. His eyes were fixed, and directed towards the door—but they never moved when Mr Percy entered, nor did Lord Oldborough stir at his approach. From one hand, which hung over the arm of his chair, his spectacles had dropped; his other hand grasped an open letter.

"My dear lord!" cried Mr Percy.

He neither heard nor answered. Mr Percy opened the window and let down the blind. Then attempting to raise the hand which hung down, he perceived it was fixed in all the rigidity of catalepsy. In hopes of recalling his senses or his power of motion, Mr Percy determined to try to draw the letter from his grasp; the moment the letter was touched, Lord Oldborough started—his eyes darting fiercely upon him.

"Who dares? Who are you, sir?" cried he.

"Your friend Percy—my lord."

Lord Oldborough pointed to a chair—Mr Percy sat down. His lordship recovered gradually from

the species of trance into which he had fallen. The cataleptic rigidity of his figure relaxed—the colour of life returned—the body regained her functions—the soul resumed at once her powers. Without seeming sensible of any interruption or intermission of feeling or thought, Lord Oldborough went on speaking to Mr Percy.

"The letter which I now hold in my hand is from that Italian lady of transcendent beauty, in whose company you once saw me when we first met at Naples. She was of high rank—high endowments. I loved her; how well—I need not—cannot say. We married secretly. I was induced—no matter how—to suspect her fidelity—pass over these circumstances—I cannot speak or think of them. We parted—I never saw her more. She retired to a convent, and died shortly after: nor did I, till I received this letter, written on her deathbed, know that she had given me a son. The proofs that I wronged her are irresistible. Would that they had been given to me when I could have repaired my injustice!—But her pride prevented their being sent till the hour of her death."

On the first reading of her letter, Lord Oldborough had been so struck by the idea of the injustice he had done the mother, that he seemed scarcely to advert to the idea of his having a son. Absorbed in the past, he was at first insensible both to the present and the future. Early associations, long dormant, were suddenly wakened; he was carried back with irresistible force to the days of his youth, and something of likeness in air and voice to the Lord Oldborough he had formerly known appeared to Mr Percy. As the tumult of passionate recollections subsided, as this enthusiastic reminiscence faded, and the memory of the past gave way to the sense of the present, Lord

Oldborough resumed his habitual look and manner. His thoughts turned upon his son, that unknown being who belonged to him, who had claims upon him, who might form a great addition to the happiness or misery of his life. He took up the letter again, looked for the passage that related to his son, and read it anxiously to himself, then to Mr Percy—observing, "that the directions were so vague, that it would be difficult to act upon them."

"The boy was sent when three years old to England or Ireland, under the care of an Irish priest, who delivered him to a merchant, recommended by the Hamburg banker, &c."

"I shall have difficulty in tracing this — great danger of being mistaken or deceived," said Lord Oldborough, pausing with a look of anxiety. "Would to God that I had means of knowing with certainty *where*, and above all, *what*, he is, or that I had never heard of his existence."

"My lord, are there any more particulars?" inquired Mr Percy eagerly.

Lord Oldborough continued to read, "Four hundred pounds of your English money have been remitted to him annually, by means of these Hamburg bankers. To them we must apply in the first instance," said Lord Oldborough, "and I will write this moment."

"I think, my lord, I can save you the trouble," said Mr Percy: "I know the man."

Lord Oldborough put down his pen, and looked at Mr Percy with astonishment.

"Yes, my lord, however extraordinary it may appear, I repeat it—I believe I know your son; and if he be the man I imagine him to be, I congratulate you—you have reason to rejoice."

"The facts, my dear sir," cried Lord Oldborough: "do not raise my hopes."

Mr Percy repeated all that he had heard from Godfrey of Mr Henry—related every circumstance from the first commencement of them—the impertinence and insult to which the mystery that hung over his birth had subjected him in the regiment—the quarrels in the regiment—the goodness of Major Gascoigne—the gratitude of Mr Henry—the attachment between him and Godfrey—his selling out of the regiment after Godfrey's ineffectual journey to London—his wishing to go into a mercantile house—the letter which Godfrey then wrote, begging his father to recommend Mr Henry to Mr Gresham, disclosing to Mr Percy, with Mr Henry's permission, all that he knew of his birth.

"I have that letter at home," said Mr Percy: "your lordship shall see it. I perfectly recollect the circumstances of Mr Henry's having been brought up in Ireland by a Dublin merchant, and having received constantly a remittance in quarterly payments of four hundred pounds a year, from a banker in Cork."

"Did he inquire why, or from whom," said Lord Oldborough; "and does he know his mother?"

"Certainly not: the answer to his first inquiries prevented all farther questions. He was told by the bankers that they had directions to stop payment of the remittance if any questions were asked."

Lord Oldborough listened with profound attention as Mr Percy went on with the history of Mr Henry, relating all the circumstances of his honourable conduct with respect to Miss Panton—his disinterestedness, decision, and energy of affection.

Lord Oldborough's emotion increased—he seemed to recognize some traits of his own character.

"I *hope* this youth is my son," said his lordship, in a low suppressed voice.

"He deserves to be yours, my lord," said Mr Percy.

"To have a son might be the greatest of evils—to have *such* a son must be the greatest of blessings," said his lordship. He was lost in thought for a moment, then exclaimed, "I must see the letter—I must see the man."

"My lord, he is at my house."

Lord Oldborough started from his seat—"Let me see him instantly."

"To-morrow, my lord," said Mr Percy, in a calm tone, for it was necessary to calm his impetuosity—"to-morrow. Mr Henry could not be brought here to-night without alarming him, or without betraying to him the cause of our anxiety."

"To-morrow let it be—you are right, my dear friend. Let me see him without his suspecting that I am anything to him, or he to me—you will let me have the letter to-night."

"Certainly, my lord."

Mr Percy sympathized with his impatience, and gratified it with all the celerity of a friend: the letter was sent that night to Lord Oldborough. In questioning his sons more particularly concerning Mr Henry, Mr Percy learnt from Erasmus a fresh and strong corroborating circumstance. Dr Percy had been lately attending Mr Gresham's porter, O'Brien, the Irishman, who had been so ill, that, imagining himself dying, he had sent for a priest. Mr Henry was standing by the poor fellow's bedside when the priest arrived, who was so much struck by the sight of him, that for some time his attention could scarcely be fixed on the sick man. The priest, after he had performed his official duties, returned to Mr Henry, begged pardon for having looked at him with so much earnestness, but said that Mr Henry strongly reminded him of the features of an Italian lady who had committed a child to his care many years ago. This led to farther explanation, and

upon comparing dates and circumstances, Mr Henry was convinced that this was the very priest who had carried him over to Ireland—the priest recognized him to be the child of whom he had taken charge; but farther, all was darkness. The priest knew nothing more—not even the name of the lady from whom he had received the child. He knew only that he had been handsomely rewarded by the Dublin merchant, to whom he had delivered the boy—and he had heard that this merchant had since become bankrupt, and had fled to America. This promise of a discovery, and sudden stop to his hopes, had only mortified poor Mr Henry, and had irritated that curiosity which he had endeavoured to lull to repose.

Mr Percy was careful, both for Mr Henry's sake and for Lord Oldborough's, not to excite hopes which might not ultimately be accomplished. He took precautions to prevent him from suspecting anything extraordinary in the intended introduction to Lord Oldborough.

There had been some dispute between the present minister and some London merchant, about the terms of a loan which had been made by Lord Oldborough—Mr Gresham's house had some concern in this transaction; and it was now settled between Mr Percy and Lord Oldborough, that his lordship should write to desire to see Mr Henry, who, as Mr Gresham's partner, could give every necessary information. Mr Henry accordingly was summoned to Clermont Park, and accompanied Mr Percy, with his mind intent upon this business.

Mr Henry, in common with all who were capable of estimating a great public character, had conceived high admiration for Lord Oldborough; he had seen him only in public, and at a distance—and it was not without awe that he now thought of being intro-

duced to him, and of hearing and speaking to him in private.

Lord Oldborough, meanwhile, who had been satisfied by the perusal of the letter, and by Mr Percy's information, waited for his arrival with extreme impatience. He was walking up and down his room, and looking frequently at his watch, which he believed more than once to have stopped. At length the door opened.

"Mr Percy, and Mr Henry, my lord."

Lord Oldborough's eye darted upon Henry. Struck instantly with the resemblance to the mother, Lord Oldborough rushed forward, and clasping him in his arms, exclaimed, "My son!"

Tenderness, excessive tenderness, was in his look, voice, soul, as if he wished to repair in a moment the injustice of years.

"Yes," said Lord Oldborough, "*now* I am happy —*now*, I also, Mr Percy, may be proud of a son—I too shall know the pleasures of domestic life. Now I am happy!" repeated he,

"And, pleased, resigned
To tender passions all his mighty mind."

THE END.

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